ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DOI-BLM-CO-040-2016-0010 EA

Renew a Grazing Permit on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment.

Prepared by:

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Colorado River Valley Field Office
2300 River Frontage Road
Silt, Colorado 81652

BLM

Colorado River Valley Field Office • COLORADO

LOCATION.

The Pretti Roberts Allotment (No. 18029) is located north of Silt, Co in Garfield County.

LEGAL DESCRIPTIONS.

Township 5 South, Range 91 West, Sections 19-21, 28-30, 32-33.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION.

These permits/leases are subject to renewal or transfer at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior for a period of up to ten years. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management has the authority to renew the livestock grazing permits/leases consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Colorado River Valley Resource Management Plan Amendment, and the Colorado Public Land Health Standards.

The mission of the BLM is "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations". Land Health Standards and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management were developed between the BLM and the Colorado Resource Advisory Council to ensure that the mission of the BLM will be achieved.

This action is needed to determine whether or not to renew a grazing permit/lease and if so under what terms and conditions to ensure that Public Land Health Standards and objectives for resource management are or will continue to be achieved.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES.

This action was scoped internally with the NEPA Interdisciplinary Team on December 4, 2015. Issues raised during the internal scoping are itemized in table 7 and analyzed in the Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences sections of each resource or resource use.

The BLM National NEPA Register (https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do) allows the public to review and comment BLM NEPA actions and projects in the Colorado River Valley Field Office. The proposed action was posted on the register and no public comments were received.

PROPOSED ACTION.

The Proposed Action is to renew a grazing permit with the following terms and conditions. The permit will be issued for a 10-year period, unless the base property is leased for less, but for

purposes of the EA we are assuming 10 years of grazing by this or another applicant (in case of transfer). The proposed action is in accordance with 43 CFR 4130.2. Scheduled grazing use, allotment summary, and terms and conditions for the proposed grazing permit are summarized below in Table 1 and Table 2.

The cattle permit would be reduced from 150 AUMs to 80 AUMs. Authorized use dates would also be moved up by 2 weeks from April 15 to April 1 to allow the permittee a flexible schedule and focus grazing use on cheatgrass in the spring and move cattle off when perennial grasses are beginning to grow. The sheep permit described in the No Action Alternative would be cancelled.

The Proposed Action reduces the total permitted use on the allotment by 80% from 394 AUMs to 80 AUMs. The reduction is based on existing patterns of use and soil survey data showing less AUMs potentially available for livestock. Previously suspended AUMs would also be cancelled.

This action also involves constructing two new ponds. One would be constructed on the east side of the allotment and the other in about the middle. The ponds would help with livestock distribution across the allotment and would be used in early spring when livestock are allowed on the allotment but water may not be running in the irrigation ditch yet. The ponds would involve approximately 1/5 of an acre of surface disturbance and would capture and store road drainage from snowmelt and large precipitation events. The areas where the ponds would be constructed are already disturbed areas. See Appendix 2 and 3 for a map and photos of the proposed pond locations.

Table 1. Proposed Grazing Schedules.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment & Number	Livestock Number	Livestock Kind	Begin Date	End Date	% BLM Land	AUMs
Wayne Pollard	0504595	Pretti-Roberts (18029)	150	Cattle	04/01	06/01	100	80

Table 2. Allotment Summary AUMs.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment & Number	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Temporary Suspended AUMS	Permitted Use
Wayne Pollard	0504595	Pretti-Roberts (18029)	80	0	0	80

Terms and Conditions.

1. Adaptive management will be employed on this allotment. The Mandatory Terms and Conditions on this grazing permit show the maximum allowable flexibility. The

permittee may use the allotment when the range is ready but not earlier than the beginning dates described in the permit.

2. The cattle permit may be used by up to 150 cattle for 2 weeks or 80 cattle for 1 month within the dates on the permit. Any other combination of livestock numbers and dates would be permissible between 2 weeks and 1 month as long as total permitted use does not exceed 80 AUMs.

3. An actual use report shall be submitted annually to the BLM office no later than 15 days after livestock have been removed (i.e. the grazing end period on the bill or permit/lease).

4. The maximum allowable use on the allotment is considered to be 40% of the current year's growth on key grass species. Key grass species are native perennial grasses.

5. Maintenance of range improvements is required and shall be in accordance with all approved cooperative agreements and range improvement permits/leases. Maintenance shall be completed prior to turnout. Maintenance activities shall be restricted to the footprint (previously disturbed area) of the project as it existed when it was initially constructed. The Bureau of Land Management shall be given 48 hours advance notice of any maintenance work that will involve heavy equipment. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a certified weed-free seed mixture of native species adapted to the site.

6. The permittee/lessees and all persons associated with grazing operations must be informed that any person who injures, destroys, excavates, appropriates or removes any historic or prehistoric ruin, artifact, object of antiquity, Native American remains, Native American cultural item, or archaeological resources on public lands is subject to arrest and penalty of law. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the proponent shall immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity of the discovery that might further disturb such materials and notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until further notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer.

7. As provided by the 2015 Colorado River Valley Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan, all public motorized and mechanized travel is limited to designated routes. Grazing permittees will maintain Administrative Access specifically for livestock operations and maintenance activities, as follows: 1) motorized access on designated routes that are closed to public motorized use; 2) motorized access in areas seasonally closed to public motorized use; and 3) motorized access off designated routes (e.g., fence maintenance). Administrative access is valid for grazing administration only and not for other purposes such as four-wheeling or big game hunting.

8. Salt, mineral blocks, and supplemental feed will be placed a minimum of 0.25 miles and preferably 0.5 miles from riparian areas and other water sources, including springs.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE.

The No Action alternative would involve reissuing the grazing permit with the following existing terms and conditions. The permit will be issued for a 10-year period, unless the base property is leased for less, but for purposes of the EA we are assuming 10 years of grazing by this or another applicant (in case of transfer). This action is in accordance with 43 CFR 4130.2. Scheduled grazing use, grazing preference, and terms and conditions for the renewed grazing permit are summarized below in Table 3 and Table 4. The proposed ponds would not be constructed.

Table 3. Grazing Schedule.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment & Number	Livestock Number	Livestock Kind	Begin Date	End Date	% BLM Land	AUMs
Wayne Pollard	0504595	Pretti-Roberts (18029)	150	Cattle	04/15	06/01	100	150

Table 4. Allotment Summary AUMs.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment & Number	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Temporary Suspended AUMS	Permitted Use
Wayne Pollard	0504595	Pretti-Roberts (18029)	150	20	0	170

Terms and Conditions.

1. Adaptive management will be employed on the allotment. The Mandatory Terms and Conditions on this grazing permit show the maximum allowable flexibility. The permittee may use the allotment when the range is ready but not earlier than the beginning dates described in the permit. The range will be considered ready when there is a minimum of 4 inches of new growth on grasses. AUM usage may not exceed active preference. An actual use statement shall be submitted no later than Aug 1 annually. Billing will be based on actual use.

2. The maximum allowable use on the allotment is considered to be 50% of the current year's growth on key grass species. Key grass species are native perennial grasses.

3. Maintenance of range improvements is required and shall be in accordance with all approved cooperative agreements and range improvement permits. Maintenance shall be completed prior to turnout. Maintenance activities shall be restricted to the footprint (previously disturbed area) of the project as it existed when it was initially constructed.

The Bureau of Land Management shall be given 48 hours advance notice of any maintenance work that will involve heavy equipment. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a certified weed-free seed mixture of native species adapted to the site.

4. The permittee and all persons associated with grazing operations must be informed that any person who injures, destroys, excavates, appropriates or removes any historic or prehistoric ruin, artifact, object of antiquity, Native American remains, Native American cultural item, or archaeological resources on public lands is subject to arrest and penalty of law. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the proponent shall immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity of the discovery that might further disturb such materials and notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until further notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer.

Other Existing Permitted Use.

One other existing permit authorizes the following grazing use (Tables 5 and 6) which would remain unchanged.

Table 5. Existing Grazing Schedule.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment & Number	Livestock Number	Livestock Kind	Begin Date	End Date	% BLM Land	AUMs
Warren Roberts	0502901	Pretti-Roberts (18029)	800	Sheep	01/01	02/15	100	242

Table 6. Existing Allotment Summary AUMs.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment & Number	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Temporary Suspended AUMS	Permitted Use
Warren Roberts	0502901	Pretti-Roberts (18029)	244	0	0	244

NO GRAZING ALTERNATIVE.

Under this alternative the grazing permits described in the Proposed Action would be cancelled. As a result, no grazing would be authorized on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment. This alternative would initiate the process in accordance with 43 CFR parts 4100 and 1600 to eliminate grazing on this allotment and would amend the Resource Management Plan.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT ANALYZED IN DETAIL.

No other alternatives were considered.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW.

The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3).

Name of Plan. Colorado River Valley Field Office Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) (BLM 2015a).

Date Approved. June 2015.

Decision Number/Page/Language.

- Livestock Grazing Management. Decision Number GRZ-GOAL-01. Page 68.

  Apply flexible and sustainable livestock grazing, in accordance with BLM Colorado Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management to contribute to local economies, ranching livelihoods, and the rural western character integral to many communities.

- Livestock Grazing Management. Decision Number GRZ-OBJ-01. Page 68.

  Meet the forage demands of livestock operations based on active use, by providing approximately 441,600 acres for livestock grazing, and provide approximately 35,500 AUMs of livestock forage.

RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, OTHER PLANS.

- Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 as amended;
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976;
- Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978;
- Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations Subpart 4100 – Grazing Administration;
- Noxious Weed Act of 1974;
- Endangered Species Act of 1973;
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969;
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918;
- National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC 470f);

- Archeological Resources Protection Act;
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act;
- Indian Sacred Sites – EO 13007; and
- Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments – EO 13175
- Colorado Public Health Standards and Livestock Grazing Management Guidelines - March 1997

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH.

In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. The five standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, special status species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands.

A Formal Land Health Assessment was conducted in the Elk Creek landscape in 2007 (BLM 2007) which included the Pretti-Roberts Allotment (#18029). At the time of the assessment, the Pretti-Roberts allotment was not meeting Standard 3 for healthy plant communities. The rationale was that cheatgrass had replaced perennial grasses and sagebrush stands were old and decadent. Historic grazing use undoubtedly contributed to the vegetative conditions observed during the land health assessment, but current grazing use was not considered to be a significant factor in the failure to achieve the standards.

The impact analysis addresses whether the proposed action or any alternatives being analyzed would result in impacts that would maintain, improve, or deteriorate land health conditions for each of the five standards. These analyses are located in the program-specific analysis in this document.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS, MITIGATION MEASURES.

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the proposed action and no action alternative. In addition, the section presents comparative analyses of the direct and indirect consequences on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the various actions.

A variety of laws, regulations, and policy directives mandate the evaluation of the effects of a proposed action and alternative(s) on certain environmental elements. Not all programs, resources or uses are present in the area, or if they are present, may not be affected by the proposed action and alternatives. Only those elements that are present and potentially affected are described and brought forth for detailed analysis (Table 7).

Table 7. Programs, Resources, and Uses (Including Supplemental Authorities).

Programs, Resources, and Uses (Including Supplemental Authorities)	Potentially Affected? Yes	No
Access and Transportation		X
Air Quality		X
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern		X
Cadastral Survey		X
Cultural Resources	X	
Native American Religious Concerns	X	
Environmental Justice		X
Farmlands, Prime or Unique		X
Fire/Fuels Management		X
Floodplains		X
Forests		X
Geology and Minerals		X
Law Enforcement		X
Livestock Grazing Management	X	
Noise		X
Paleontology	X	
Plants: Invasive, Non-native Species (Noxious Weeds)	X	
Plants: Sensitive, Threatened, or Endangered		X
Plants: Vegetation	X	
Realty Authorizations		X
Recreation		X
Social and/or Economics	X	
Soils	X	
Visual Resources		X
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid		X
Water Quality, Surface and Ground	X	
Water Rights		X
Wetlands and Riparian Zones	X	
Wild and Scenic Rivers		X
Wilderness/WSAs/Wilderness Characteristics		X
Wildlife: Aquatic / Fisheries	X	
Wildlife: Migratory Birds	X	
Wildlife: Sensitive, Threatened, and Endangered Species	X	
Wildlife: Terrestrial	X	

CULTURAL RESOURCES

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Grazing authorization renewals are undertakings under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. During Section 106 review, a cultural resource assessment (CRVFO#1016-9) was completed for the Pretti-Roberts allotment on February 28, 2016 by Erin Leifeld, Colorado River Valley Field Office Archaeologist. The assessment followed the procedures and guidance outlined in the 1980 National Programmatic Agreement Regarding the Livestock Grazing and Range Improvement Program, IM-WO-99-039, IM-CO-99-007, IM-CO-99-019, and IM-CO-01-026. The results of the assessment are summarized in the table below. Copies of the cultural resource assessments are available at the Colorado River Valley Field Office archaeology files.

Data developed here was taken from the cultural program project report files, site report files, and base maps filed at the Colorado River Valley Field Office as well as information from General Land Office (GLO) maps, BLM land patent records, and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) site records, report records, and GIS data.

Table 8 below is based on the allotment specific analysis for the allotment in this EA. The table shows known cultural resources, the potential of Historic Properties, and Management recommendations.

Table 8. Cultural Resources Assessment Summary.

Allotment Name and Number	Acres Inventoried at a Class III level	Acres NOT Inventoried at a Class III Level	Percent Allotment Inventoried at a Class III Level (%)	Number of Cultural Resources known in Allotment	High Potential of Historic Properties (yes/no)	Management Recommendations (Additional inventory required and historic properties to be visited)
Pretti-Roberts #18029	557	1280	30.3%	22	Yes	Two sites (5GF.4486 & 5GF4490) are recommended to be monitored and no further inventory is required.

The Pretti-Roberts Allotment #18029 has had five previous cultural resource inventories (CRVFO# 1012, 1071, 1111-20, 1112-18, 15404-2) conducted totaling 557 acres inventoried. Twenty-two cultural resources have been identified in the allotment and include eleven prehistoric isolated finds and one historic isolated finds which are not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Additionally, four prehistoric sites (5GF.4487, 5GF.3386, 5GF.311, and 5GF344) four historic sites (5GF3381, 5GF.3632, 5GF.3405.1 and 5GF.4489) are not eligible for the NRHP. Finally, two prehistoric sites (5GF4490 and 5GF.4486) are potentially eligible for the NRHP. Looking at the GLOs from 1883 there are no historic features within this allotment.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

The direct impacts that occur where livestock concentrate, during normal livestock grazing activity, can include trampling, chiseling, artifact breakage, and churning of site soils, cultural features, and cultural artifacts. Impacts from livestock standing, leaning, and rubbing against historic structures, above-ground cultural features, and rock art can also have direct impacts to cultural resources. Indirect impacts include soil erosion and gullying, which can lead to increased ground visibility which has the potential to increase unlawful collection and vandalism. Continued livestock use in these concentration areas has the potential to cause substantial ground disturbance and in turn, irreversible adverse effects to historic properties. New range improvements, maintenance of existing range improvements, or additional feeding areas may require cultural resource inventories, monitoring, and/or data recovery.

All Alternatives. Based on the affected environment analysis, portions of allotment may require additional inventory in areas livestock concentrate, areas of known historic activity, or monitoring of known cultural resources.

No additional inventory is recommended within the allotment during the term of this permit. Three cultural resources (5GF.315, 5GF.4486 & 5GF4490) are recommended to be revisited and monitored for adverse impacts.

Proposed Acton Alternative. A reduction in the total AUMs of the allotment by reducing the number of cattle and cancelling the sheep permit on the allotment may be beneficial to protecting cultural resources from trampling and ground disturbance in areas where livestock concentrate and inventory had not yet occurred. Additionally, the requirement for maximum allowable forage use and a flexible on/off date helps to reduce potential impacts of livestock to undocumented cultural resources because it may lessen ground disturbance and my help prevent erosion. The areas of the two proposed ponds have been inventoried for cultural resources (CRVFO CRIR#15404-2) and there are no sites.

No Action Alternative. Under this alternative, no new changes would be proposed to livestock kind, season of use, or duration of use within the allotment. Likely no new disturbances to cultural resources will occur from this continued use, but existing disturbance are like to continue.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, direct and indirect impacts to cultural resources from grazing would be reduced based on the absence of livestock and no related surface disturbing activities.

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

American Indian religious concerns are legislatively considered under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (PL 95-341), the Native American Graves Environmental

Assessment Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (PL 101-601), and Executive Order 13007 (1996; Indian Sacred Sites). These require, in concert with other provisions such as those found in the NHPA and Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), that the federal government carefully and proactively take into consideration traditional and religious Native American culture and life. This ensures, to the degree possible, that access to sacred sites, the treatment of human remains, the possession of sacred items, the conduct of traditional religious practices, and the preservation of important cultural properties are considered and not unduly infringed upon. In some cases, these concerns are directly related to "historic properties" and "archaeological resources". In other cases, elements of the landscape without archaeological or other human material remains may be involved. Identification of these concerns is normally completed during the land use planning efforts, reference to existing studies, or via direct consultation.

The Ute have a generalized concept of spiritual significance that is not easily transferred to Euro-American models or definitions. The BLM recognizes that the Ute have identified sites that are of concern because of their association with Ute occupation of the area as part of their traditional lands. The cultural resource evaluation of the allotment describing known cultural resources and their condition was sent to the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the Uinta and Ouray Agency Ute Indian Tribe. The letter, sent on January 15, 2016, requested the tribes to identify issues and areas of concern within the allotment. No comments were received.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action Alternative. During the cultural resource overview, one cultural resource (5GF344) is a type previously identified as being of interest to local tribes. The site is recommended to be monitored for impacts from livestock grazing and if impacts are determined, continued consultation with Native American tribes will help to determine the best approach for mitigation.

No Action Alternative. During the cultural resource overview, one cultural resource (5GF344) is a type previously identified as being of interest to local tribes. The site is recommended to be monitored for impacts from livestock grazing and if impacts are determined, continued consultation with Native American tribes will help to determine the best approach for mitigation.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, direct and indirect impacts to cultural resources from grazing would be reduced based on the absence of livestock and no related surface disturbing activities. Therefore, areas of concern to Native American tribes would not be affected.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING MANAGEMENT

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Pretti-Roberts Allotment is located in Garfield County approximately 2 miles north of Silt, CO. The allotment is approximately 1,828 acres in size although only about 560 acres are useable by livestock. The slopes consist mostly of pinyon and juniper with sparse understory vegetation and the flatter areas consist of small sagebrush parks. The area receives approximately 14 inches of precipitation annually (HPRCC). A forage production inventory was completed based on useable acreage and soil mapping to determine potential production available to livestock. The data from that inventory is summarized in the following table.

Table 9. Forage Production Inventory.

Soil Map Unit	Acres	Normal Year Production	Ecological Site	Forage Species Production	Livestock AUMS
66	244	0	Rock Outcrop	0	0
21	93	800	Rolling Loam	59,520	26
41	92	800	Rolling Loam	58,880	26
56	32	800	Rolling Loam	20,480	9
55	16	800	Rolling Loam	10,240	4
58	66	533	Rolling Loam	28,142	12
67	8	0	Rock Outcrop	0	0
51	5	800	Rolling Loam	3,200	1
50	3	800	Rolling Loam	1,920	1
				Total	80

Cattle use has typically occurred around the irrigation canal since it is currently the only water source on the allotment. The permittee has used salt to help distribute cattle more evenly on the allotment. The area that was burned receives the highest use levels since it is between the water and slating locations and is the largest open field within the allotment. Use levels have varied between light to heavy. Attempts have been made to focus use on early green up of cheatgrass but perennial seeded grasses have suffered from grazing use that extends into later spring.

Sheep use has not occurred on the allotment for at least 30 years. The permittee suggests that snow in the winter is not sufficient to maintain sheep on the allotment and the trip to the allotment would not be worth it.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. The proposed action would cancel the existing sheep permit on the allotment. The permit has not been used for approximately 30 years and therefore no change would be expected in the impacts associated with this permit.

The cattle permit would be reduced by approximately 50% from 150 AUMs to 80 AUMs. This change would help ensure the allotment will be able to support the level of permitted livestock use. The period of use would be 2 weeks to 1 month depending on livestock numbers and would

be authorized between April 1 and June 1. The period of use is flexible so that the permittee can use the allotment as early as possible to focus grazing use on cheatgrass in early spring. The intention is to graze on cheatgrass and be off the allotment by the time perennial grasses start their rapid growth cycle in the spring.

Two ponds would be constructed on the allotment to help improve distribution and allow for the potential to turn cattle onto the allotment earlier in the spring when cheatgrass is available for grazing. The ponds would also provide water sources for wildlife.

No Action Alternative. This alternative would authorize the same level of use that currently exists. The sheep permit would not be cancelled and the potential for the sheep permittee to use the allotment in the winter will still exist. The potential impacts of sheep use in the winter would be focused mainly on sagebrush and some dormant grass species.

The cattle permit would continue to be authorized for up to 150 AUMs which would likely not be supportable by the allotment and still achieve land health standards. The season of use would not be adjusted to be more flexible for the permittee. Grazing use maybe focused on cheatgrass still but may also overlap more of the perennial grass growth period.

Ponds would not be constructed and the potential benefit of the ponds would not be realized.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative the grazing permits associated with the Pretti-Roberts Allotment would be cancelled. Cancelling grazing use on this allotment may result in an economic loss to the permittee. This alternative would also initiate the process in accordance with 43 CFR parts 4100 and 1600 to eliminate grazing on this allotment and devote the land to some other purpose and would result in amendments to the resource management plan.

PLANTS: INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES (NOXIOUS WEEDS)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Effects of Livestock. Livestock grazing can contribute to the establishment and expansion of noxious weeds and other invasive species through numerous mechanisms. Areas of disturbance provide an optimal location for noxious weed establishment and subsequent invasion (Sheley, et. al 2011). When livestock utilize an allotment they create localized areas of disturbance (i.e., bare ground), especially where animals congregate such as trails, loafing areas, salting areas, water sources, and other range improvements. When over-utilization occurs on a large scale, extensive areas of disturbance can develop, which can open up areas to the establishment of noxious weeds and other invasive species.

Risks of noxious weed introduction and spread would generally be greater with more AUMs unless livestock grazing management is specifically adjusted - by changing the season of use, duration, or intensity - to accomplish defined vegetation or weed reduction goals.

Seed Dispersal. Seed dispersal is another mechanism through which noxious weeds are spread. Livestock handlers, stock dogs, horses, feed, and equipment can potentially serve as vectors for seeds to be introduced or dispersed. Livestock can transport weed seeds from infested areas to uninfested areas through incomplete digestion and the attachment of seeds to body parts.

Additional Vectors for Seed Dispersal. People recreating and vehicles traveling across BLM lands can bring weeds from infested areas to non-infested areas through seed dispersal. Pack and saddle stock users can spread weeds through weed infested feed, incomplete digestion, and the attachment of seeds to body parts. Wind and wildlife also spread weeds. Surface disturbances such as fire and construction projects increase the risk for weed establishment.

Inventory. Preventing and controlling noxious weed encroachment depends on early detection (Sheley, et al. 2011). Landscape-wide weed inventories can help with early detection and controlling noxious weeds and other invasive species infestations. Although a landscape-wide inventory has not been completed on the Pretti-Roberts (No. 18029) Allotment, infestations known to occur within or adjacent to the Allotment are listed in Table 10. It is assumed that these and other noxious weeds/invasive species may be found in areas throughout the allotment.

Table 10. Known Noxious Weeds within the Pretti-Roberts Allotment.

Common Name	*Scientific Name*	State Designation
Houndstongue	*Cynoglossum officinale*	B
Canada thistle	*Cirsium arvense*	B
Musk thistle	*Carduus nutans*	B
Plumeless thistle	*Carduus acanthoides*	B
Russian knapweed	*Acroptilon repens*	B
Scotch thistle	*Onopordum acanthium*	B

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would cancel the existing sheep permit on the allotment. The sheep permit has not been used for approximately 30 years and no change would be expected to the impacts associated with sheep grazing and invasive non-native species and noxious weeds. The Proposed Action would authorize 80 AUMs of cattle use between April 1 and June 1. This results in a reduction from the previous authorization of 150 AUMs. Reducing the stocking rate would likely result in utilization levels below 40% which should maintain the health of perennial grasses and minimize areas of disturbance. The period of use would enable the permittee to use the allotment in early spring which will target grazing use on cheatgrass instead of perennial grasses that become available later in the growing season. Targeted grazing of the cheatgrass by livestock may reduce its' reproductive capability. The Proposed Action authorizes the construction of two ponds on the allotment which will improve livestock distribution and utilization patterns thereby minimizing the establishment of noxious weeds in areas of bare ground associated with over-utilization. The ponds are being constructed in previously disturbed areas so localized weed infestations will likely continue around areas

where livestock have traditionally congregated (e.g., trails, loafing areas, range improvements) unless consistently sprayed with multi-year treatments. Wind, wildlife, wildfire, recreation use and vehicles also will be vectors for seed transport and weed expansion.

No Action Alternative. The sheep permit would not be canceled and sheep would graze between January 1 and February 15. Sheep use during the winter would have little effect on creating areas of disturbance that would enable noxious weed establishment and infestation. Sheep, supplemental feed, and livestock operators may serve as a vector for the transport of seed to the allotment. Under the No Action Alternative cattle use would remain at 150 AUMs and no changes to the stocking rate may create areas of bare ground associated with over utilization that could lead to the establishment and spread of noxious weeds and invasive species. The period of use would occur later in the growing season and livestock would target perennial grasses instead of focusing utilization on cheatgrass and its reproductive capability would not be reduced. Under the No Action Alternative two ponds would not be constructed and livestock would continue to concentrate around the primary water source of the allotment. The areas of bare ground around where livestock water and congregate provide a niche for noxious weeds and invasive species to establish and spread.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur on the allotment and there would be no direct or indirect spread of weeds from livestock use or management activities associated with grazing. Wind, wildlife, wildfire, recreation use and vehicles will continue to be vectors for seed transport and weed expansion.

SENSITIVE, THREATENED, AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

There are no known occurrences and no suitable habitat for any special status plant species on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

All Alternatives. None of the alternatives would impact special status plants.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 4 FOR SPECIAL STATUS PLANTS.

Due to the absence of any special status plants on the allotment, there would be no impact on Standard 4 for special status plants.

VEGETATION

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Pretti-Roberts allotment lies on the south side of the Grand Hogback, north of Silt. Due to the south-facing aspect, this allotment is relatively hot and dry. There is no water on the allotment other than a ditch that traverses approximately 0.25 miles of the allotment. On most of the allotment, vegetation consists of a dense stand of Wyoming big sagebrush with some cheatgrass and a sparse understory of native perennial grasses such as Sandberg bluegrass, western wheatgrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, and Indian ricegrass. In the concentrated OHV use areas on the east side, vegetation is dominated by cheatgrass. A portion of the allotment which burned in the mid-2000's and was reseeded to perennial grasses, now supports a mixture of cheatgrass and cool-season perennial grasses such as various wheatgrasses and Indian ricegrass.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Livestock grazing results in the direct removal of vegetation. Properly managed livestock grazing can improve plant vigor by removing dried stems and seedheads thereby improving photosynthetic activity of live plant material (Loeser et al 2004). If the timing or intensity of grazing does not allow adequate recovery and regrowth periods between grazing events, grazing may reduce plant vigor or cause plant mortality by depleting root reserves, changing the species' composition in favor of less palatable plant species (Fleischner 1994, Jones 2000). Excessive trampling causes soil compaction resulting in decreased vegetative cover, less vigorous root systems, and more exposure of the soil surface to erosion and invasion by noxious weeds.

Proposed Action. The proposed action would cancel the existing sheep permit on the allotment. The sheep permit has not been used for approximately 30 years and therefore no change would be expected in the impacts on vegetation associated with this permit.

The proposed action would authorize 80 AUMs of cattle use between April 1 and June 1. This would be a reduction from the previous authorization of 150 AUMs. Soil survey data indicates that 80 AUMs is closer to the actual available forage on the allotment that would result in a sustainable level of use. Stocking at this level would likely enable utilization to stay below the 40% limit that is expected to maintain the health of perennial grasses.

The growing season on this allotment is relatively short because soil moisture from snowmelt dries up by late spring and the allotment receives little summer precipitation to sustain active plant growth. Thus, if annual or perennial grasses are grazed in late spring or early summer, they may not be able to regrow and produce seed. The period of use would be from 2 weeks to 1 month long depending on livestock numbers and would be authorized between April 1 and June 1. The period of use would enable the permittee to use the allotment in early spring to focus grazing use on cheatgrass which may green-up as soon as the snow begins to melt. Grazing the allotment while cheatgrass is actively growing and before perennial grasses begin growth may reduce the reproductive capability of cheatgrass without harming perennial grasses when they are actively growing.

Two ponds would be constructed on the allotment to aid in livestock distribution and allow for the potential to turn cattle onto the allotment earlier in the spring when cheatgrass is available for grazing. Each of the two ponds would create approximately $1/5^{th}$ of an acre of surface disturbance. Both ponds would be located in previously disturbed areas, so there would be negligible loss of perennial vegetation.

No Action Alternative. The cattle permit would continue to be authorized for up to 150 AUMs which would likely not be supportable by the allotment and still make progress towards achieving land health standards. The season of use would not be adjusted to be more flexible for the permittee. The current permit also stipulates that the range would not be considered ready for grazing until perennial grasses are at least 4 inches high. This means grazing would occur when perennial grasses are actively growing. Grazing use at this stage of growth may focus on cheatgrass but may also result in excessive use on perennial grasses which may deplete root reserves and not allow for perennial grasses to set seed. Vegetative conditions would be unlikely to improve.
Ponds would not be constructed and grazing use would continue to be concentrated in the central part of the allotment where the ditch is located, resulting in excessive use in this area and little or no use in the outlying areas of the allotment.

The sheep permit would not be canceled and sheep use could occur between January 1 and February 15. In the winter, sheep would browse primarily on sagebrush and dormant grasses. Browsing on sagebrush might result in some thinning of the dense sagebrush canopy and may allow a slight increase in herbaceous growth. Grazing on dormant grasses would be unlikely to have any substantial effects on the vigor or composition of grasses.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to vegetation from livestock use. Some trampling or removal of vegetation, particularly browsing of shrubs in the winter and grazing of grasses in the spring, may still occur from wildlife grazing.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 3 FOR HEALTHY PLANT COMMUNITIES.

The Pretti-Roberts Allotment was assessed in 2007 as part of the Elk Creek Land Health Assessment Area (BLM 2008a). At the time of the assessment, the Pretti-Roberts Allotment was not meeting Standard 3 for healthy plant communities due to the abundance of cheatgrass and a corresponding lack of perennial grasses and forbs, as well as old and decadent sagebrush and some pinyon-juniper encroachment. The proposed action with its flexible grazing dates would not likely further degrade land health conditions and may actually begin to improve and move towards meeting Standard 3. The No Action alternative is less likely to make progress towards achieving the standard for healthy plant communities because the timing and intensity of grazing may cause heavy use on perennial grasses, resulting in reduced vigor and an inability to set seed.

SOCIO-ECONOMICS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Regionally, livestock operations are dependent on both federal lands (BLM and U.S. Forest Service) and nonfederal lands (state and private). The federal grazing fee for public lands managed by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service is approximately $2.11 per animal unit month (AUM). An AUM is the amount of forage needed to sustain one cow and her calf, one horse, or five sheep or goats for a month. The annually adjusted grazing fee is computed by using a 1966 base value of $1.23 per AUM for livestock grazing on public lands in the western states. The figure is then adjusted according to three factors - current private grazing land lease rates, beef cattle prices, and the cost of livestock production. The formula used for calculating the grazing fee, established by Congress in the 1978 Public Rangelands Improvement Act, has continued under a presidential Executive Order issued in 1986. Under that order, the grazing fee cannot fall below $1.35 per AUM, and any increase or decrease cannot exceed 25 percent of the previous year's level.

Public land grazing in the CRVFO supports a traditional and historical way of life. Although historically livestock grazing in the region was at a higher intensity than at the present time, the livestock business has, and continues to be a traditional way of life for many permit holders. Income derived from public land grazing permits continues to comprise a moderate to substantial portion of their individual livelihoods.

The total economic contribution from ranching operations on BLM lands is statistically low within the region. Jobs and labor income associated with BLM grazing accounts for less than 1 percent of the area's total jobs and labor income (BLM 2014).

Fees paid to the federal government for livestock grazing permits generate revenue for the U.S. Treasury, of which 12.5 per cent is returned to the local Grazing Advisory Board to fund range improvements and maintenance projects. This provides a direct economic benefit to the permit holders who pay the fees. The support of livestock operations contributes to the economic support of local communities and to the livestock industry in the West in general.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would renew a ten year term grazing lease for the livestock operator, thereby continuing an historical and traditional way of life for this area. The social value of retaining a rural, agricultural lifestyle would be preserved and would align with many of the public's perception of the western Colorado culture.

Issuance of the grazing leases would allow the lease holders to continue their grazing operations with some degree of predictability during the ten-year period of the term lease.

The local economy is benefited from capital spent to establish and maintain a ranching operation and contributions to the labor force. The Proposed Action would support some direct employment. Additional employment would be generated as the affected livestock operators purchase services and materials as inputs ("indirect" effects) and ranchers spend their earnings within the local economy ("induced" effects).

A sheep permit would be cancelled. Although this would normally have a negative financial impact to the permittee in this case the permittee had not used the permit for approximately 30 years so cancelling the permit would have little to no effect to the permittee.

No Action Alternative. This alternative would have the same or similar impacts as the Proposed Action.

No Grazing Alternative. Under the No Grazing Alternative, the ten year term grazing lease would not be renewed. The individual lease holders could be negatively impacted in the short term by loss of income. If livestock grazing was terminated, there would also be adverse impacts to the base property owner(s). There could be an annual loss of income because they may not be able to lease their private lands without having the BLM land grazing allotment. Consequently, the value of their properties could be reduced because of the elimination of the federal grazing preference. Such a loss of income would be important to the individuals, but would likely not measurably or adversely impact the local economies.

SOILS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

According to the *Soil Survey of Rifle Area, Colorado: Parts of Garfield and Mesa Counties* (NRCS 1985), the allotment contains 10 soil map units that are highly variable. The following is a brief description of the dominant soil map units found within the allotment (NRCS 2016). A map is found in Appendix 1.

Cushman-Lazear stony loam (21). This soil map unit is found on mountainsides and mesa breaks at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 feet and on slopes of 15 to 65 percent. They are derived from sandstone and shale rocks. Approximately 45 percent of this soil map unit is Cushman soil, 40 percent Lazear soil, and the other 15 percent a mixture of soil types. The Cushman soil is moderately deep, well drained and has medium surface runoff with severe erosion hazard. The Lazear soil is shallow, well drained and has moderately rapid surface runoff with severe erosion hazard.

Kim loam (41). This deep, well drained moderately sloping soil is found on alluvial fans and benches at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 6,000 feet and on slopes of 6 to 12 percent. This soil is derived from sandstone and shale alluvium. Surface runoff is slow and the erosion hazard is moderate.

Potts loam (56). This deep, well-drained soil is found on mesas, benches, and the sides of valleys at elevations ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 feet and on slopes of 6 to 12 percent. Parent material for this soil includes sandstone, shale, and basalt. Surface runoff for this soil is medium and the erosion hazard is severe.

Torriorthents-Camborthids - Rock outcrop complex, steep (66). This soil map unit consists

of sandstone and shale bedrock and soils of variable depth occurring on slopes of 15 to 70 percent. About 45 percent of this complex is Torriorthents, 20 percent is Camborthids, and 15 percent is Rock outcrop. The Camborthids occur on the lower toe slopes on foothills and mountainsides while the Torriorthents are found on the foothills and mountainsides below the Rock outcrop. The Torriorthents are shallow to moderately deep, and clayey to loamy with gravel, cobbles, and stones. The Camborthids are shallow to deep and clayey to loamy. Rock outcrop primarily consists of Mesa Verde sandstones and Wasatch shales with occasional basaltic boulders and stones. This complex is characterized by moderate to severe erosion hazard.

Torriorthents-Rock outcrop complex, steep (67). This complex consists of stony soils and exposed outcrops of Mesa Verde sandstone and Wasatch shale that occur on slopes of 15 to 70 percent. Approximately 60 percent of this complex is Torriorthents and 25 percent is Rock outcrop. The Torriorthents are clayey to loamy and contain gravel, cobbles, and stones; many of which are basaltic in origin. They are found on mountainsides below the Rock outcrop. Erosion hazard for this complex varies from moderate to severe.

Soil health was evaluated in 2007 during the Elk Creek Land Health Assessment. BLM staff concluded that soils were generally meeting land health standards throughout the allotment, with slight to moderate departures from expected conditions (BLM 2008a).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Grazing activities within the allotment may result in soil compaction and displacement, especially in areas where livestock would be concentrated such as watering areas and stock trails. Soil compaction and displacement would increase the likelihood of erosional processes on steep slopes and areas devoid of vegetation. Soil detachment and sediment transport are likely to occur during runoff events associated with spring snowmelt and short-duration high intensity thunderstorms. These processes could result in rilling, rutting, and sediment deposition.

With the reduction of AUMs and implementation of new grazing standards and guidelines, it is expected that the potential negative impacts described above would be short-term and localized. The period of use is flexible so that the permittee can use the allotment as early as possible to focus grazing use on cheatgrass rather than perennial grasses. Impacts to soils may include hoof compaction during wet soil conditions of early spring. Pond construction will have site specific soil impacts during excavation and compaction, but direct impacts to soils during construction will be small in scale with approximately $1/5^{th}$ of an acre per pond. Both ponds would be located in previously disturbed areas to minimize soil disturbance. Overall, soil conditions may improve with better livestock distribution from the two new ponds and greater flexibility in timing and use.

No Action Alternative. This alternative would authorize the same level of use that currently exists. The sheep permit would not be cancelled and the potential for the sheep grazing in the winter will still exist. The cattle permit would continue to be authorized for up to 150 AUMs which is not supportable by the allotment. Cheatgrass would continue to dominate and soil conditions may decline overtime. Ponds would not be constructed and the potential benefit

better livestock distribution would not take place. Thus, soils may continue to experience heavy utilization and have the potential to remain in a static or declining state.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to soils from livestock use. Trampling or removal of plant material may still occur from wildlife grazing. In addition, soil disturbance and erosion may persist due to other surface disturbing activities, such as roads and trails that exist throughout the allotment.

Analysis of Public Land Health Standard 1 for Soils.

Based on the Elk Creek Land Health Assessment, soil and site stability indicators received departure from expected ratings of 'none to slight' with the exception of indicators for water flow patterns, pedestals, and bare ground, which received ratings of 'slight to moderate' (BLM 2008a). Thus, BLM staff concluded that Standard 1 for Upland Soils was being achieved for the majority of the allotment (BLM 2008a). Implementation of the proposed action is not anticipated to degrade soil health from current conditions.

PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment.

Occurrences of paleontological resources are closely tied to the geologic units (i.e., formations, members, or beds) that contain them. The probability for finding paleontological resources can be broadly predicted from the geologic units present at or near the surface. Therefore, geologic mapping can be used for assessing the potential for the occurrence of paleontological resources.

Using the Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) system, geologic units are classified based on the relative abundance of vertebrate fossils or scientifically significant invertebrate or plant fossils and their sensitivity to adverse impacts, with a higher class number indicating a higher potential. The PFYC system is meant to provide baseline guidance for predicting, assessing, and mitigating paleontological resources. The classification system ranges from Class 1 - Very Low to Class 5 - Very High.

Environmental Consequences.

All Alternatives. The two proposed stock ponds are located in Potential Fossil Yield Class 5b – Wasatch and Ohio Creek Formation. Class 5b areas are underlain by geologic units with very high potential but have lowered risks of human-caused adverse impacts and/or lowered risk of natural degradation due to moderating circumstances. The bedrock unit has very high potential, but a protective layer of soil, thin alluvial material, or other conditions may lessen or prevent potential impacts to the bedrock resulting from the activity.

Since the topsoil is considered relatively deep across the allotment and no geologic outcrops are present at the proposed ponds sites, no impacts to paleontological resources are expected.

WATER QUALITY (SURFACE AND GROUND)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Pretti-Roberts allotment is drained by several south-flowing unnamed intermittent and ephemeral streams that are tributary to the Colorado River. The southern boundary of the allotment more or less follows the East Lateral Farmer Irrigation Ditch. Flow from the eastern portion of the allotment generally empties into either the Ware and Hinds Ditch or the Cactus Valley Ditch. Thus, these ditches somewhat isolate the Colorado River from potential water quality impacts that could occur from grazing activity on the allotment. BLM staff assessed this allotment in 2007 as part of the Elk Creek Land Health Assessment, but due to the intermittent nature of the streams in this allotment, no water quality data was collected at the time.

The State of Colorado has developed *Stream Classifications and Water Quality Standards* that identify beneficial uses of water and numeric standards used to determine allowable concentrations of water quality parameters (CDPHE 2015). The drainages throughout the proposed allotment are tributary to the Lower Colorado River Basin and have water use classifications described below:

Table 11. State of Colorado's Stream Classifications for drainages in the Pretti-Roberts allotment (CDPHE 2015).

Stream Segment Description	Classifications
4a. All tributaries, including wetlands, to the Colorado River from the confluence with the Roaring Fork River to a point immediately below the confluence with Parachute Creek.	Aquatic Life Cold 2 Recreation N Water supply Agriculture

Aquatic life cold 2 indicates waters that are not capable of sustaining a wide variety of cold water biota. Recreation N refers to stream segments with surface waters that are not suitable or intended to become suitable for primary contact recreation uses. Water supply and agriculture refer to stream segments that are suitable or intended to become suitable for potable water supplies and suitable for irrigation or livestock use.

The State of Colorado has developed a *303(d) List of Impaired Waters* and *Monitoring and Evaluation List* (CDPHE 2012) that identifies stream segments that are not currently meeting water quality standards with technology based controls alone. The drainages within the Pretti-Roberts allotment are listed as selenium impaired (CDPHE 2012). This segment has been given a medium priority by the State of Colorado to develop a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), a value of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can receive while still meeting water quality standards. Selenium is mobilized in the ecosystem primarily by flood irrigation practices and naturally by rainfall and snowmelt, in selenium rich soils, such as Mancos Shale. Thus, livestock grazing is thought to have little effect on selenium transport to the Colorado River.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Direct impacts to water quality from livestock grazing may result in elevated turbidity, nutrients and fecal coliform bacteria, if livestock begin to congregate near water sources for extended periods of time. Hoof action can cause surface compaction, stream bank shearing, elevated erosion rates and subsequent deterioration of water quality. Indirect impacts may result from excessive utilization in upland watershed areas reducing effective vegetative cover, elevating erosion potential and increasing sediment delivery to streams, which could negatively impact water quality. The proposed stocking rates and duration are not expected to have a negative effect on water quality. Any sediment that is produced in areas where livestock may congregate would likely be captured by the existing vegetative ground cover or adjacent ditch systems. Allowing for adaptive management may provide for better protection of upland vegetation and soil conditions and subsequently maintain water quality conditions. The construction of two stock ponds will capture snow melt runoff and will likely only hold water for a short period in the spring and early summer when livestock are present. Quality of the stock water will have higher temperatures and lower DO, but these water quality impacts are small in scale and occur for a relatively short time period.

> ***Mitigation.*** Minimize selenium contributions to water bodies through best management practices. Range improvement projects that have the potential for selenium leaching, such as stock ponds or water developments should utilize bentonite or other types of liners. New water developments should be located outside of Mancos Shale geology, where possible, or utilize above ground stock tanks.

No Action Alternative. This alternative would authorize the same level of use that currently exists. The sheep permit would not be cancelled and the potential for the sheep grazing in the winter will remain. The cattle permit would be authorized for up to 150 AUMs, which is not supportable by the allotment. Cheatgrass would continue to dominate and soil conditions may decline overtime. Ponds would not be constructed and the potential benefit better livestock distribution would not take place. Soils and upland vegetation may continue to experience heavy utilization and have the potential to remain in a static or declining land health condition. Subsequently, impacts to water quality may increase if sediment is transported to nearby drainages.

No Grazing Alternative. Under this alternative, no livestock grazing would occur and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to water quality from livestock use. Trampling or removal of plant material may still occur from wildlife grazing, and soil disturbance and erosion may persist due to other surface disturbing activities, such as roads and trails that exists throughout the allotment, which could potentially affect water quality.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 5 FOR WATER QUALITY.

During the Land Health Assessment, BLM staff determined that site-specific conditions on the Pretti-Roberts allotment did not appear to be negatively impacting water quality (BLM 2008a). However, the intermittent tributaries in this allotment are listed on the State's 303(d) list of impaired water quality for selenium contribution to the Colorado River, and therefore are not meeting Land Health Standard 5. Selenium transport is primarily associated with irrigation

practices on saline soils or Mancos Shale geology. Thus, grazing practices are not normally considered a causal factor for selenium transport. Implementation of the proposed action is not anticipated to degrade water quality from current conditions.

WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

There are no riparian zones on the allotment other than a few mature cottonwoods growing along the banks of the Farmer's Irrigation Ditch.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

None of the alternatives would result in any change to riparian areas.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 2 FOR RIPARIAN SYSTEMS.

Due to the absence of riparian areas on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment, none of the alternatives would impact Standard 2.

AQUATIC WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES (INCLUDING SENSITIVE, THREATENED, AND ENDANGERED SPECIES)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Table 12 summarizes Federally listed, proposed and candidate aquatic wildlife species potentially occurring in Garfield County (USFWS 2015) and downstream along the Colorado River in Mesa County as well as species on the Colorado BLM State Director's Sensitive Species List (BLM 2015b) that may occur in the allotment.

Table 12. Special Status Aquatic Wildlife Species Summary.

Federally Listed, Proposed or Candidate Aquatic Wildlife Species		
Species and Status	**Habitat/Range Summaries**	**Occurrence/ Potentially Impacted**
Green lineage cutthroat trout *(Oncorhynchus clarki stomias)* Threatened	The greenback cutthroat trout is the subspecies of cutthroat trout native to the Platte River drainage on the Eastern Slope of Colorado. The USFWS is advising federal agencies to consider green lineage cutthroat trout on the Western Slope of CO as threatened until such time as review and interpretation of recent genetics and meristic research has been completed.	Absent/No
Bonytail chub *(Gila elegans)*	This large chub is a member of the minnow family found in large, fast-flowing waterways of the Colorado River system. Their current distribution and habitat status are largely unknown due to its rapid decline prior to research	Absent/No

Endangered	into its natural history. The bonytail is extremely rare in Colorado and no self-sustaining population exists. Only one has been captured in the state since 1980.	
Colorado pikeminnow *(Ptychocheilus lucius)* Endangered	Primarily exists in the Green River below the confluence with the Yampa River, the lower Duchesne River in Utah, the Yampa River below Craig, Colorado, the White River from Taylor Draw Dam near Rangely downstream to the confluence with the Green River, the Gunnison River in Colorado, and the Colorado River from Palisade, Colorado, downstream to Lake Powell. Colorado pikeminnow populations in the upper Colorado River basin are now relatively stable or growing. Designated Critical Habitat includes the Colorado River and its 100-year floodplain west (downstream) from the town of Rifle.	Absent/No
Humpback chub *(Gila cypha)* Endangered	Found in deep, clear to turbid waters of large rivers and reservoirs over mud, sand or gravel. The nearest known population of humpback chub is in the Colorado River at Black Rocks west of Grand Junction.	Absent/No
Razorback sucker *(Xyrauchen texanus)* Endangered	The razorback sucker was once widespread throughout most of the Colorado River Basin from Wyoming to Mexico. In the upper Colorado River Basin, they are now found only in the upper Green River in Utah, the lower Yampa River in Colorado and occasionally in the Colorado River near Grand Junction. Because so few of these fish remain in the wild, biologists have been actively raising them in hatcheries in Utah and Colorado and stocking them in the Colorado River. Designated Critical Habitat for the razorback sucker includes the Colorado River and its 100-year floodplain west (downstream) from the town of Rifle.	Absent/No

Colorado BLM Sensitive Aquatic Wildlife Species Present or Potentially Present in the Project Area

Species	Habitat/Range Summaries	Occurrence/ Potentially Impacted
Northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens)*	Generally found in wet meadows and in shallow lentic habitats between 3,500 to 11,000 feet. They require year-round water sources deep enough to provide ice free refugia in the winter. Within the CRVFO, this species has been documented in locales where quality riparian vegetation exists in conjunction with perennial water sources. Larger populations have been documented northwest of King Mountain within the small drainage that feeds King Mountain (Ligon) Reservoir, June Creek and East Divide Creek south of Silt, and in portions of the Rifle Creek watershed north of Rifle.	Absent/No
Boreal toad (*Bufo boreas boreas*)	Occurs between 7,000-12,000 feet in the Southern Rocky Mountains in the vicinity of mountain lakes, ponds, meadows, and wetlands in subalpine forest (e.g., spruce, fir, lodgepole pine, aspen). Adults often feed in meadows and forest openings near water, but sometimes in drier forests. Restricted to areas with suitable breeding habitat in spruce-fir forests and alpine meadows. Breeding habitat includes lakes, marshes, ponds, and bogs with sunny exposures and quiet, shallow water.	Absent/No
Bluehead sucker (*Catostomus discobolus*) , Flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis), and* Roundtail chub (*Gila robusta)*	Primarily found in larger rivers, but may also be found in smaller tributaries with good connectivity to larger river systems. These fish are endemic to the Colorado River basin and reside within the mainstem Colorado River and its major tributary streams. Given their biology, feeding habits, habitat needs, and niche in the ecosystem, these species can persist in the face of actions that increase sediments to streams and rivers containing these species.	Absent/No

Mountain sucker (*Catostomus platyrhynchus*)	Found primarily in small, low- mid elevation streams in northwestern Colorado with gravel, sand or mud bottoms. They inhabit undercut banks, eddies, small pools, and areas of moderate current. Young fish prefer backwaters and eddies. Within the CRVFO, the only known occurrence is in Piceance Creek.	Absent/No
Colorado River cutthroat trout (CRCT) (*Oncorhynchus clarkii pleuriticus*)	Prefers clear, cool headwaters streams with coarse substrates, well-distributed pools, stable streambanks, and abundant stream cover.	Absent/No

Fish. There are no fish bearing streams or riparian zones on the allotment.

Amphibians. Amphibians in Colorado need access to ponds, lakes, seeps, springs, or other bodies of water. They avoid cold winter temperatures and dry midday summer heat by taking refuge in buffered microenvironments such as underground burrows, crevices beneath rocks, or bodies of water. Amphibian records within the CRVFO are limited, and extensive surveys have not been conducted, but the following species are known to occur in the CRVFO. Western chorus frogs (*Pseudacris triseriata*) and Woodhouse's toads (*Bufo woodhousii*) occur throughout Colorado. Western chorus frogs are found primarily in wetland marshes and pond margins, also including seasonal waters, and across a wide range of elevations. Woodhouse's toads are present in ponds and slow-flowing streams, including seasonal waters, below 7,000 feet in Colorado. Great Basin spadefoot toads in Colorado generally breed in temporary pools and flood waters along perennial steams. They typically inhabit pinyon-juniper woodlands, sagebrush, and semi-desert shrublands, mostly below 6,000 feet in elevation. Suitable habitat is not available on the allotment for northern leopard frogs or boreal toads. Tiger salamanders (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) occur throughout Colorado near ponds, lakes, and water impoundments up to 12,000 feet in elevation (Hammerson 1999).

Aquatic Macroinvertebrates. Aquatic habitats within the allotment support aquatic macroinvertebrates, which are organisms without backbones that are visible without a microscope. They live on, under, and around rocks and sediment in the bottoms of lakes, rivers, and streams for at least part of their life cycles. Major groups include arthropods (i.e., crustaceans and insects), mollusks, sponges and nematode worms. The most abundant are typically aquatic insect larvae such as mayflies, stoneflies, and caddis flies. Aquatic insects are good indicators of stream health, and are an important link in the aquatic food chain, particularly as a food source for fish, amphibians, and many terrestrial animals such as birds and bats. A lack of adequate aquatic invertebrates can negatively impact fish productivity.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Changes in grazing management would not affect aquatic wildlife in the allotment.

The construction of two ponds would result in the depletion of 0.4 acre-feet of water from within the Colorado River basin. This project falls under BLM Colorado's Programmatic

Biological Assessment (PBA) for water depleting activities (excluding fluid minerals development) on BLM lands in the Colorado River basin in Colorado (BLM 2008b).

In response to BLM's PBA, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) issued a Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO)(ES/GJ-6-CO-08-F-0010) on February 25, 2009, which concurred with BLM's determination that water depletions are "Likely to Adversely Affect" the Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail, and razorback sucker. Likewise, the project is also likely to adversely affect designated critical habitats for these endangered fish along the Green, Yampa, White, Colorado, and Gunnison rivers. However, the FWS also determined that BLM water depletions from the Colorado River Basin are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail, or razorback sucker, and that BLM water depletions are not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

A Recovery Implementation Program for Endangered Fish Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin was initiated in January 1988. The Recovery Program serves as the reasonable and prudent alternative to avoid jeopardy and aid in recovery efforts for these endangered fishes resulting from water depletions from the Colorado River Basin. The PBO addresses internal and external BLM projects including impoundments, diversions, water wells, pipelines, and spring developments. The FWS determined that projects that fit under the umbrella of the PBO would avoid the likelihood of jeopardy and/or adverse modification of critical habitat for depletion impacts to the Upper Colorado River Basin if they deplete relatively small amounts of water (less than 100 AF) and BLM makes a one-time contribution to the Recovery Implementation Program for Endangered Fish Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin (Recovery Program) in the amount equal to the average annual acre-feet depleted by each project. The PBO instructed BLM to make an annual payment to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to cover all BLM authorized actions that result in water depletions. The two new ponds would be expected to deplete an average total of 0.4 acre feet annually. The depletion fee for this project would be $8.10 ($20.24 x 0.4 AF). This project has been entered into the 2016 Field Office water depletion log which will be submitted to the Colorado State Office at the end of the Fiscal Year. The Colorado State Office is responsible for paying depletion fees based on the annual statewide total.

The new ponds would provide habitat for aquatic macroinvertebrates and amphibians.

No Action Alternative. The two ponds would not be constructed and there would be no water depletions from the Colorado River Basin. There would be no new habitat for aquatic macroinvertebrates and amphibians.

No Grazing Alternative. Livestock grazing on the allotment would cease. The two ponds would not be constructed and there would be no water depletions from the Colorado River Basin. There would be no new habitat for aquatic macroinvertebrates and amphibians.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 3 AND 4 FOR AQUATIC WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES.

The allotment was assessed as part of the Elk Creek Land Health Assessment (BLM 2008a). Due to the lack of perennial streams, Standards 3 and 4 for Aquatic Wildlife were not

specifically assessed for the allotment. Within the watershed assessment area, given the perennial streams assessed, their potential, known constraints, and stream and riparian habitat conditions, Standard 3 was being met. The changes in livestock grazing would not affect aquatic wildlife. Pond construction would result in a depletion of 0.4 acre feet, which would result in a depletion fee of $8.10. The new ponds would create new habitat for aquatic macroinvertebrates and amphibians. The Proposed Action would not affect the achievement of these standards for aquatic wildlife and fisheries.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) provides protections to native birds, with the exception of certain upland fowl managed by state wildlife agencies for hunting. Within the context of the MBTA, migratory birds include non-migratory resident species as well as true migrants. For most migrant and resident species, nesting habitat is critical for supporting reproduction in terms of both nest sites and food. Also, because birds are generally territorial during the nesting season, their ability to access and utilize sufficient food is limited by the quality of the occupied territory. During non-breeding seasons, birds are generally non-territorial and able to feed across a larger area and wider range of habitats.

The project area provides cover, forage, breeding, and/or nesting habitat for a variety of migratory birds that summer, winter, or migrate through the area. Migratory bird species that are federally listed and classified by the BLM as sensitive species are addressed in the Wildlife: Sensitive, Threatened, and Endangered Species section of this EA.

BLM Instruction Memorandum No. 2008-050 provides guidance toward meeting the BLM's responsibilities under the MBTA and the Executive Order 13186. The guidance directs Field Offices to promote the maintenance and improvement of habitat quantity and quality and to avoid, reduce or mitigate adverse impacts on the habitats of migratory bird species of conservation concern to the extent feasible, and in a manner consistent with regional or statewide bird conservation priorities.

The MBTA prohibits the "take" of a protected species. Under the Act, the term "take" means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct. The USFWS interprets "harm" and "kill" to include loss of eggs or nestlings due to abandonment or reduced attentiveness by one or both adults as a result of disturbance by human activity, as well as physical destruction of an occupied nest.

The 1988 amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act mandates the USFWS to "identify species, subspecies, and populations of all migratory nongame birds that, without additional conservation actions, are likely to become candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973." The *Birds of Conservation Concern 2008* (USFWS 2008) is the most recent effort to carry out this mandate. The CRVFO is within the Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau Bird Conservation Region 16.

The project area includes the following plant communities and potentially associated migratory bird species.

Pinyon-juniper woodlands. Pinyon and juniper trees provide food, cover and nest sites for numerous migratory birds. Species on the Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) list that occur in the CRVFO and are associated with pinyon-juniper woodlands include the pinyon jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*), juniper titmouse (*Baeolophus ridgwayigra*) and Ferruginous Hawk *(Buteo regalis).* Other migratory species associated with this plant community within the CRVFO include the broad-tailed hummingbird (*Selasphorus platycercus*), black-chinned hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*), Say's phoebe (*Sayornis saya*), ash-throated flycatcher *(Myiarchus cinerascens),* gray flycatcher (*Empidonax wrightii),* Townsend's solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*), American robin (*Turdus migratorius*), Western bluebird *(Sialia Mexicana),* mountain bluebird (*S. currucoides*), bushtit *(Psaltriparus minimus),* blue-gray gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*), plumbeous vireo (*Vireo plumbeus*), Western scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma californica*), Clarks's nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*), black-throated gray warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*), Virginia's warbler (*Oreothlypis virginiae*), chipping sparrow (*Spizella passerina*), lesser goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*) and house finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*). Winter visitors to pinyon-juniper habitats include the Cassin's finch (*Carpodacus cassinii*), a BCC species, which typically nests in montane and subalpine forests, though occasionally nests in pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Sagebrush shrublands. Sagebrush and the associated native perennial grasses and forbs provide food, cover and nest sites for migratory birds. Sagebrush obligates that potentially occur in the CRVFO include the sagebrush sparrow (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*), sage thrasher *(Oreoscoptes montanus)* and Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), a BCC species. Other migratory species associated with sagebrush shrublands within the CRVFO include the western kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), green-tailed towhee (*Pipilo chlorurus*), vesper sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*) and lark sparrow *(Chondestes grammacus).* Some species are associated with both pinyon-juniper woodlands and sagebrush shrublands, including the Say's phoebe and gray flycatcher.

Raptors. Many raptors forage over wide areas, so even if they aren't known to nest in a specific area, they may still fly over searching for food. Raptors on the BCC list that occur in portions of the CRVO include the golden eagle *(Aquila chrysaetos),* Bald Eagle *(Haliaeetus leucocephalus),* Ferruginous Hawk *(Buteo regalis),* prairie falcon *(Falco mexicanus),* peregrine falcon *(F. peregrinus)* and flammulated owl *(Psiloscops flammeolus).* Prairie falcons nest on rocky ledges and cliffs and hunt in grasslands and semi-desert shrublands. Peregine falcons hunt near nest sites and along rivers and lakes, but can be found in nearly any open vegetation community during migration and winter. Flammulated owls typically nest in ponderosa pine and aspen forests, but have been found nesting in mixed forests, and reportedly use old-growth pinyon-juniper woodlands.

A variety of raptors not on the BCC list are known to occur in the CRVO including the American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), red-tailed hawk *(Buteo jamaicensis),* long-eared owl (*Asio otus*), great horned owl *(Bubo virginianus),* northern pygmy

owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*) and northern saw-whet owl (*Aegolius acadius).* The northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), a BLM sensitive species, is an occasional winter visitor to pinyon-juniper woodlands from its nesting habitat in montane and subalpine forests.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Livestock grazing can alter vegetation structure, composition, and function. Effects on migratory birds are dependent on the species of interest and may be adverse or beneficial depending on grazing timing, frequency, and intensity. Aerial, bark and canopy insectivores may be less influenced by grazing than species feeding on nectar, insects, or seeds in the understory or on the ground. Birds may be displaced as a result of grazing. Trampling of nests, eggs, or young could occur. Losses or decreases in vegetation from overgrazing can decrease rodent prey species and affect local populations of raptors. Areas lacking vegetative structure and complexity would be expected to be lacking bird species richness. This is especially important in riparian areas, which provide habitat for many species in the arid and semiarid west, including upland birds, waders, shorebirds, raptors, neotropical migrants and passerines. Migratory birds could be temporarily displaced from vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock. As long as acceptable utilization levels are maintained and land health standards are achieved, any negative impacts to migratory birds from livestock grazing are expected to be minimal and isolated, and should not influence migratory bird populations on a landscape level.

Proposed Action. The cattle permit would be reduced from 150 to 80 AUMS, authorized use dates would be moved up to April 1 to focus grazing use on cheatgrass, the sheep permit would be cancelled, and two new ponds would be constructed. The reduction in AUMs should enable utilization to stay below 40%, which would be expected to help maintain healthy perennial grasses that provide forage, cover, and vegetative diversity for various migratory birds. Grazing the allotment while cheatgrass is growing should reduce the density and size of cheatgrass plants. Experimental evidence supports that shrubsteppe birds prefer to eat native grass seeds rather than cheatgrass (Goebel and Berry 1976, Kelrick et al. 1986). Because the sheep permit has not been used for approximately 30 years, no change in impacts to migratory birds would be expected. Migratory birds would be expected to drink and bathe in the new ponds, and potentially benefit from increased insect populations. The ponds would also be expected to improve livestock distribution and allow for the potential to turn cattle onto the allotment earlier in the spring to coincide with cheatgrass green-up. Cattle would graze the allotment during the first part of the core breeding period for the majority of BCC potentially in the allotment (May 15-July 15).

No Action Alternative. AUMs would not be reduced, authorized use dates would not be changed to focus grazing use on cheatgrass, ponds would not be constructed, and the sheep permit would not be cancelled. Progress towards achieving land health standards would be less likely with 150 AUMs than under the Proposed Action's 80 AUMs. The timing of livestock grazing may not coincide with cheatgrass green-up. Migratory birds would not benefit from the new ponds.

No Grazing Alternative. No livestock grazing would occur, and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to migratory birds from livestock use. Perennial grass and forb cover should

increase over time in the absence of livestock, thereby improving conditions for many migratory birds. However, the density and size of cheatgrass plants would not be reduced by cattle grazing during cheatgrass green-up. No ponds would be constructed. There would no disturbance to migratory birds from vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARDS 3 AND 4 FOR MIGRATORY BIRDS.

The allotment was not meeting Land Health Standard 3 for Terrestrial Wildlife when assessed in 2007 (BLM 2008a), primarily due to widespread cheatgrass. A lack of seral stages in sagebrush stands and pinyon-juniper encroachment were also contributing to the poor quality of wildlife habitat. The watershed assessment area was meeting Standard 4 for migratory birds and raptors. The Proposed Action would not be expected to further degrade land health conditions. The reduced AUMs, flexible grazing dates to focus cattle grazing on cheatgrass green-up, and ponds to improve livestock distribution could result in progress towards achieving Standard 3.

SENSITIVE, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE

Table 13 summarizes Federally listed, proposed and candidate terrestrial wildlife species potentially occurring in Garfield County (USFWS 2015) and species on the Colorado BLM State Director's Sensitive Species List (BLM 2015b) that may occur in the allotment.

Table 13. Special Status Terrestrial Wildlife Species.

Federally Listed, Proposed, or Candidate Terrestrial Wildlife Species		
Species and Status	**Habitat/Range Summaries**	**Occurrence/ Potentially Impacted**
Canada lynx (*Lynx Canadensis)* Threatened	Canada lynx occupy high-latitude or high-elevation coniferous forests characterized by cold, snowy winters and an adequate prey base. In the western US, lynx are associated with mesic forests of lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, Engelmann spruce, and quaking aspen in the upper montane and subalpine zones, generally between 8,000 and 12,000 feet in elevation. The Forest Service has mapped suitable denning, winter, and other habitat for lynx within the White River and Routt National Forests. The mapped suitable habitat comprises areas known as Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs) that are the approximate size of a female's home range. Several LAUs include small parcels of BLM lands. There are no LAUs or mapped lynx linkage areas in the project area.	Absent/No
Mexican spotted owl *(Strix occidentalis lucida)* Threatened	This owl nests, roosts, and hunts in mature coniferous forests in canyons and foothills. The key habitat components are old-growth forests with uneven-age stands, high canopy closure, high tree density, fallen logs and snags. The only extant populations in Colorado are in the Pikes Peak and Wet Mountain areas of south-central Colorado and the Mesa Verde area of southwestern Colorado.	Absent/No

Yellow-billed cuckoo *(Coccyzus americanus)* Threatened	This secretive species occurs in mature riparian forests of cottonwoods and other large deciduous trees with a well-developed understory of tall riparian shrubs. Western cuckoos breed in large blocks of riparian habitats, particularly woodlands with cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii*) and willows (*Salix* sp.). A few sightings of yellow-billed cuckoo have occurred in western Colorado along the Colorado River near Grand Junction. There is no proposed critical habitat in the Colorado River Valley Field Office.	Absent/No
Colorado BLM Sensitive Terrestrial Wildlife Species Present or Potentially Present in the Project Area		
Species	**Habitat/Range Summaries**	**Occurrence/ Potentially Impacted**
Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*) Fringed myotis (*Myotis thysanodes)* Spotted bat *(Euderma maculatum)*	Townsend's big eared bats and fringed myotis occur as scattered populations at moderate elevations on the western slope of Colorado. Habitat associations are not well defined. Both bats wil forage for aerial insects over pinyon-juniper, montane conifer and semi-desert shrubland communities. These species roosts in caves, rock crevices, mines, buildings and tree cavities. Both species are widely distributed and usually occur in small groups. Townsend's big-eared bats are not abundant anywhere in its range due to patchy distribution and limited availability of suitable roosting. Spotted bats have been detected in Colorado in ponderosa pine woodlands or montane forests, pinyon-juniper woodlands, and riparian vegetation; over sand and gravel bars; and in open semidesert shrublands. The species needs access to water and suitable cracks and crevices in rocky cliffs for roosting. Limited information is available for this species in the CRVFO. No roosts or hibernaculum for any of these species are documented in the project area.	Possible/No
Rocky mountain bighorn sheep *(Ovis canadensis)*	Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep typically inhabit steep, precipitous mountain and canyon terrain with good visibility and escape terrain. The CRVFO includes the Glenwood Canyon, Derby Creek, Deep Creek and Battlement Mesa herds. Additional herds inhabit nearby USFS lands.	Absent/No
Northern goshawk (*Accipter gentilis)*	Montane and subalpine coniferous forests and aspen forests; may move to lower elevation pinyon-juniper woodlands in search of prey during winter. Preys on small-medium sized birds and mammals. Breeds in coniferous deciduous and mixed forests. Nests are typically located on a northerly aspect in a drainage or canyon and are often near a stream. Nest areas contain one or more stands of large, old trees with a dense canopy cover. A goshawk pair occupies its nest area from March until late September. The nest area is the center of all movements and behaviors associated with breeding from courtship through fledging.	Absent/No
Ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*)	Open, rolling and/or rugged terrain in grasslands and shrubsteppe communities; also grasslands and cultivated fields; nests on cliffs and rocky outcrops. Fall/ winter resident, non-breeding.	Possible/No
Golden eagle *(Aquila chrysaetos)*	Nesting/Roosting: cliffs and trees. Forages widely over open habitats, including grasslands and sagebrush, particularly in areas with abundant rabbits. Suitable mixes of sagebrush and cliffs can support high concentrations. Primary forages include small rodents, hares, and rabbits, and carrion during winter.	Possible/No
Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)	Nesting/Roosting: mature cottonwood forests along rivers. Foraging: fish and waterfowl along rivers and lakes; may feed on carrion, rabbits and other foods in winter. Bald eagle winter range is mapped along Dry Rifle Creek, West Elk Creek, and the Colorado River, and overlaps with the northern and southern portions of the allotment.	Possible/No

American Peregrine Falcon *(Falco peregrinus anatum)*	Rare spring and fall migrant in western valleys. Peregrine falcons inhabit open spaces associated with high cliffs and bluffs overlooking rivers. The falcon nests on high cliffs and forages over nearby woodlands.	Possible/No
Greater Sage-grouse *(Centrocercus urophasianus)*	Greater sage-grouse are found only in areas where sagebrush is abundant, providing both food and cover. Within the CRVFO, greater sage-grouse are present in the northeast part of the Field Office in the Northern Eagle/Southern Routt population. While small (<500 birds), this population probably has, or had, a relationship with the larger population in Moffat, Rio Blanco and western Routt counties, and probably with the Middle Park population to the east. The allotment does not include lands allocated as priority habitat management areas (PHMA) and general habitat management areas (GHMA).	Absent/No
Columbian sharp-tailed grouse *(Tympanuchus phasianellus columbian)*	Use a variety of habitats within sagebrush, mountain shrub, and riparian areas. From spring to fall a component of denser riparian or mountain shrub vegetation is important for escape cover. Winter habitat contains a dominant component of deciduous trees and shrubs. In Colorado, leks typically occur in sagebrush.	Absent/No
Black swift *(Cypseloides niger)*	Nest in colonies on vertical rock faces, near waterfalls or in dripping caves. Birds arrive in Colorado in June and take all summer to raise a single nestling. Adults forage widely on aerial insects.	Absent/No
Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella berweri*)	Summers in western Colorado mountain parks and is a spring/fall migrant at lower elevations. Sagebrush obligate with an apparently secure conservation status in Colorado. Primary habitat is mature big sagebrush 1.6-3 ft. tall with low to moderate canopy cover, and habitat patches ≥15 acres. Mesic sites, particularly riparian areas within sagebrush habitats, are also an important primary habitat component. Alteration of vegetation in sagebrush habitats due to livestock grazing may affect Brewer's sparrow abundance. Grazing may occasionally affect Brewer's sparrow nests through trampling or disturbance (Vasquez 2005). Problems with pinyon and juniper encroachment and poor sagebrush condition could be impacting potential habitat, but would not be affected by grazing management.	Possible/Yes
Midget faded rattlesnake *(Crotalus viridis concolor)*	Found in northwestern Colorado, including western Garfield County. Sagebrush communities with an abundance of south-facing rock outcroppings and exposed canyon walls. Rocky outcrops are essential for cover, variable thermal conditions and hibernation.	Possible/No

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Due to the absence of critical habitat, occupied habitat, or known occurrences of any Federally listed, proposed, or candidate terrestrial wildlife species in the project area, the Proposed Action would have ***No Effect*** on listed wildlife populations.

Livestock grazing can alter vegetation structure, composition, and function. The response of special status wildlife to livestock grazing varies by habitat, species, and grazing (e.g., numbers, timing, frequency, intensity). Direct impacts include the removal and/or trampling of vegetation that would otherwise be used for food and cover; trampling of nests, eggs, or young; and livestock-wildlife interactions that may result in wildlife displacement or disease transmission. Wildlife could be displaced by vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock. Indirect impacts result from changes in plant community composition, structure, and productivity which together largely determine the suitability of wildlife habitat and habitat for insect and rodent prey species. Conversely, livestock grazing can have a beneficial effect on forage quality by removing the rough or dried

seedheads and stems, while leaving or creating the more palatable leaves. A management strategy that incorporates rest periods and movement of livestock through different pastures is generally more desirable for plant growth and protecting special status wildlife species habitat than season-long grazing.

Proposed Action. The cattle permit would be reduced from 150 to 80 AUMS, authorized use dates would be moved up to April 1 to focus grazing use on cheatgrass, the sheep permit would be cancelled, and two new ponds would be constructed. The reduction in AUMs should enable utilization to stay below 40%, which would be expected to help maintain healthy perennial grasses and benefit special status wildlife. Grazing the allotment while cheatgrass is growing should reduce the density and size of cheatgrass plants. Because dense and dominant populations of cheatgrass can degrade habitat for special status species, using livestock grazing as a biological control would improve conditions for special status wildlife. Because the sheep permit has not been used for approximately 30 years, no change in impacts to special status wildlife and their habitats would be expected. Some special status species would be expected to use the new ponds. Some special status species, particularly bats, could potentially benefit from insect populations associated with the ponds. The ponds would also be expected to improve livestock distribution and allow for the potential to turn cattle onto the allotment earlier in the spring to coincide with cheatgrass green-up. Cattle would graze the allotment during the first part of the core breeding period for the majority of BCC potentially in the allotment, including Brewer's sparrows (May 15-July 15).

No Action Alternative. AUMs would not be reduced, authorized use dates would not be changed to focus grazing use on cheatgrass, ponds would not be constructed, and the sheep permit would not be cancelled. Progress towards achieving land health standards would be less likely with 150 AUMs than under the Proposed Action's 80 AUMs. The timing of livestock grazing may not coincide with cheatgrass green-up. Special status wildlife would not benefit from the new ponds.

No Grazing Alternative. No livestock grazing would occur, and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to special status wildlife from livestock use. Perennial grass and forb cover should increase over time in the absence of livestock, thereby improving conditions for many special status species. However, the density and size of cheatgrass plants would not be reduced by cattle grazing during cheatgrass green-up. No ponds would be constructed. There would no disturbance to special status wildlife from vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock.

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARD 4 FOR SPECIAL STATUS WILDLIFE.

The allotment was not meeting Land Health Standard 3 for Terrestrial Wildlife when assessed in 2007 (BLM 2008a), primarily due to widespread cheatgrass. A lack of seral stages in sagebrush stands and pinyon-juniper encroachment were also contributing to the poor quality of wildlife habitat. Overall, the watershed assessment area was meeting Standard 4 for migratory birds and raptors. The Proposed Action would not be expected to further degrade land health conditions. The reduced AUMs, flexible grazing dates to focus cattle grazing on cheatgrass green-up, and ponds to improve livestock distribution could result in progress towards achieving Standard 3. Standard 4 would be maintained under the Proposed Action.

TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT.

Diverse plant communities across the CRVFO support a variety of terrestrial wildlife that summer, winter, or migrate through the area. Wildlife need to move across the landscape for food, cover and in response to seasonal conditions. Human development and activities have fragmented habitat, and in some cases, created barriers to wildlife movement. Factors contributing to wildlife disturbance or degradation and fragmentation of habitat include power lines, pipelines, fences, public recreation use, residential and commercial development, vegetation treatments, livestock and wild ungulate grazing, oil and gas development, fire suppression, roads and trails.

Big Game. Mule deer *(Odocoileus hemionus)* and Rocky Mountain elk *(Cervus elaphus nelsonii)* are recreationally important species that occur in the project area. BLM managed lands provide a large portion of the undeveloped habitat for big game in Colorado. Mule deer and elk typically occupy higher elevation, forested areas during summer and migrate to lower elevation sagebrush-dominated ridges and south-facing slopes during winter. The allotment is mapped as mule deer and elk winter and severe winter range as well as a winter concentration area for both species. Winter range is often considered the most limiting habitat type for mule deer and elk, so effective management of these areas is particularly important to the health of mule deer and elk populations.

Other Mammals. Numerous small mammals could reside within the planning area, including mice (*Peromyscus* spp.), woodrats (*Neotoma* spp.), ground squirrels *(Spermophilus* spp.*)*, chipmunks (*Neotamias* spp.), rabbits *(Sylvilagus* spp.), skunks *(Mephitis mephitis)*, raccoons *(Procyon lotor)* and porcupines (*Erethizon dorsatum*). Many of these mammals are prey for raptors and larger carnivores. Larger carnivores expected to occur include bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) and coyotes (*Canis latrans*). CPW has mapped the entire project area as mountain lion (*Felis concolor*) and black bear (*Ursus americanus*) habitat. The southern portion of the allotment is mapped as a mountain lion-human conflict area. Mountain lions are most likely to be in the vicinity when mule deer are present. Bats documented in Northwest Colorado that could occur in the CRVFO that are not on the BLM special status species list include pallid bats (*Antrozous pallidus*), big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*), silver-haired bats (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*), hoary bats (*Lasiurus cinereus*), California myotis (*Myotis californicus*), Western small-footed myotis (*M. ciliolabrum*), long-eared myotis (*M. evotis*), little brown myotis (*M. lucifugus*), long-legged myotis (*Myotis volans*), Yuma myotis (*M. yumanensis*), big free-tailed bats (*Nyctinomops macrotis*), canyon bats (*Parastrellus hesperus*), and Brazilian free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*).

Gallinaceous Birds. Game birds commonly found in the project area include dusky grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus)* and wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). The allotment is mapped as turkey overall range, and winter range is mapped in the southeastern portion of the allotment.

Waterfowl. There are no rivers, perennial streams, reservoirs, or ponds in the allotment.

Reptiles. Reptile species most likely to occur in the allotment include sagebrush lizards (*Sceloporus graciosus*), prairie and plateau lizards *(S. undulatus)*, tree lizards *(Urosaurus ornatus)*, gopher snakes or bullsnakes (*Pituophis catenifer*), and western terrestrial garter snakes (*Thamnophis elegans*). Gopher snakes can be found throughout Colorado in most plant communities, including riparian areas, semidesert and mountain shrublands, pinyon-juniper woodlands, and ponderosa pine and other montane woodlands. Western terrestrial garter snakes occur throughout most of western Colorado, usually below 11,000 feet. Smooth green snakes (*Opheodrys vernalis*) can be present in riparian areas, but in western Colorado, may also be common in mountain shrublands far from water (Hammerson 1999).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES.

Proposed Action. Domestic livestock can compete with mule deer and elk for herbaceous forage, although moderate levels of grazing can also help promote shrub growth by limiting grasses. Conversely, livestock grazing can have a beneficial effect on forage quality by removing the rough or dried seedheads and stems, while leaving or creating the more palatable leaves for deer or elk to graze later in the season. Maintaining acceptable utilization levels is particularly important on mule deer and elk winter range and severe winter range.

The cattle permit would be reduced from 150 to 80 AUMS, authorized use dates would be moved up to April 1 to focus grazing use on cheatgrass, the sheep permit would be cancelled, and two new ponds would be constructed. Reducing AUMs should enable utilization to stay below 40%, which would be expected to help maintain healthy perennial grasses. Increased perennial grass and forb cover would benefit terrestrial wildlife by providing forage, and concealment for smaller species. Improving the condition of understory vegetation could also lead to increased small mammal abundance and diversity, potentially improving the prey base, and benefiting a variety of terrestrial wildlife species.

Grazing the allotment while cheatgrass is growing should reduce the density and size of cheatgrass plants. Because dense and dominant populations of cheatgrass can degrade habitat for a variety of species, using livestock grazing as a biological control would improve conditions for terrestrial wildlife. Because the sheep permit has not been used for approximately 30 years, no change in impacts to terrestrial wildlife and their habitats would be expected.

Big game and a variety of nongame wildlife species would be expected to use the new ponds. Many species, particularly bats, could potentially benefit from insect populations associated with the ponds. The ponds would also be expected to improve livestock distribution and allow for the potential to turn cattle onto the allotment earlier in the spring to coincide with cheatgrass green-up.

No Action Alternative. AUMs would not be reduced, authorized use dates would not be changed to focus grazing use on cheatgrass, ponds would not be constructed, and the sheep permit would not be cancelled. Progress towards achieving land health standards would be less likely with 150 AUMs than under the Proposed Action's 80 AUMs. The timing of livestock grazing may not coincide with cheatgrass green-up. Terrestrial wildlife would not benefit from the new ponds.

No Grazing Alternative. No livestock grazing would occur, and there would be no direct or indirect impacts to terrestrial wildlife from livestock use. Perennial grass and forb cover should increase over time in the absence of livestock, thereby improving conditions for various species. However, the density and size of cheatgrass plants would not be reduced by cattle grazing during cheatgrass green-up. No ponds would be constructed. There would no disturbance to terrestrial wildlife from vehicular traffic or human presence during maintenance of infrastructure or tending to livestock.

Analysis of Public Land Health Standard 3 for Terrestrial Wildlife.

The allotment was not meeting Land Health Standard 3 for terrestrial wildlife when assessed in 2007 (BLM 2008a), primarily due to widespread cheatgrass. A lack of seral stages in sagebrush stands and pinyon-juniper encroachment were also contributing to the poor quality of wildlife habitat. The reduced AUMs, flexible grazing dates to focus cattle grazing on cheatgrass green-up, and ponds to improve livestock distribution would not be expected to degrade conditions, and could result in progress towards achieving Standard 3.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS.

Soil and Water. Cumulative impacts to soil and water resources can occur from existing roads and trails throughout the allotment. Roads and trails can contribute to increased surface runoff and accelerated erosion, especially where proper drainage is lacking. Other impacts such as vegetation treatments or weed treatments may also change water infiltration or runoff rates and affect soil and water resources. Based on limited land management activities occurring across the allotment, it is assumed that cumulative effects to soil and water are minor if proper best management practices are implemented.

Wildlife, Including Special Status Species. The area covered by the Proposed Action only comprises a small portion of the watershed. Many other land use activities (e.g., recreation, housing, road maintenance, oil and gas development) occur within the watershed. All of these activities have altered the amount of suitable and potentially suitable habitats for terrestrial wildlife species. Cumulatively, many of the future actions planned on private and other lands may have some undetermined effect on wildlife including special status species habitat. The Proposed Action would create negligible landscape-level cumulative impacts to wildlife when viewed in comparison with those activities currently occurring and reasonably certain to occur on adjacent private/other lands.

CONSULTATION.

The following stakeholders were contacted:

- Southern Ute Indian Tribe
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- Uinta and Ouray Agency Ute Indian Tribe

- Grazing permittee

LIST OF PREPARERS.

Members of the CRVFO Interdisciplinary Team who participated in the impact analysis of the Proposed Action and alternative, development of appropriate mitigation measures, and preparation of this EA are listed in Table 14, along with their areas of responsibility.

Table 14. BLM Interdisciplinary Team Authors and Reviewers.

Name	Title	Areas of Participation
Isaac Pittman	Rangeland Management Specialist	NEPA Lead, Livestock Grazing
Kristy Wallner	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species (Noxious Weeds)
Carla DeYoung	Ecologist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Special Status Plants, Vegetation, Wetlands & Riparian Zones, Land Health Standards
Kimberly Leitzinger	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness, Wild and Science Rivers
Pauline Adams	Hydrologist	Soil, Water, Air, Geology
Hilary Boyd	Wildlife Biologist	Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife (including Special Status Species), Migratory Birds
Greg Wolfgang	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Transportation, Visual Resources
Erin Leifeld	Archeologist	Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns
Brian Hopkins	Assistant Field Manager	NEPA Compliance

REFERENCES.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 2008a. Elk Creek Land Health Assessment Summary Report and Pretti-Roberts Evaluation and Determination Document.

_____. 2008b. Programmatic Biological Assessment for BLM actions in Western Colorado re: water depletions and effects on the four endangered big river fishes: Colorado pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*), humpback chub (*Gila cypha*), bonytail chub (*Gila elegans*), and razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*). July 18, 2008.

_____. 2014. Colorado River Valley Field Office Proposed Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement.

_____. 2015a. Colorado River Valley Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan. Website: http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/land_use_planning/rmp /kfo-gsfo /colorado_river_valley0.html. Accessed on 8-03-15.

_____. 2015b. Information Bulletin No. CO-2015-034. State Director's Sensitive Species List, June 22, 2015.

Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE). 2015. Regulation No. 37, Classifications and Numeric Standards for Lower Colorado River Basin (5 CCR 1002-37). Water Quality Control Commission. Available online: http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/regulations/wqccregs/

Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE). 2012. Regulation No. 93, Colorado's 303 (d) List of Impaired Waters and Monitoring and Evaluation List, (5 CCR 1002-93). Water Quality Control Commission. Available online: http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/regulations/wqccregs/

Fleischner, T.L. 1994. Ecological costs of livestock grazing in western North America. *Conservation Biology* 8:629-644.

Goebel, C.J. and G. Berry 1976. Selectivity of range grass seeds by local birds. Journal of Range Management 29:393-395.

Hammerson, G. A. 1999. Amphibians and Reptiles in Colorado. University Press of Colorado and Colorado Division of Wildlife. Niwot, CO, USA.

HPRCC (High Plains Regional Climate Center), Data collected from the Rifle station, http://www.hprcc.unl.edu/data/historical/index.php

Jones, A. 2000. Effects of cattle grazing on North American arid ecosystems: a quantitative review. Western North American Naturalist 60: 155-164.

Kelrick, M. I., J.A. MacMahon, R.R. Parmenter, and D.V. Sisson. 1986. Native seed preference of shrubsteppe rodents, birds and ants: the relationships of seed attributes and seed use. Oecologia 68:327-337.

Loeser, M. R., T .E. Crews, and T. D. Sisk. 2004. Defoliation increased above-ground productivity in a semi-arid grassland. Journal of range Management 57: 442-447.

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). 1985. Soil Survey of Rifle Area, Colorado, Parts of Garfield and Mesa Counties. Available online: http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/colorado/

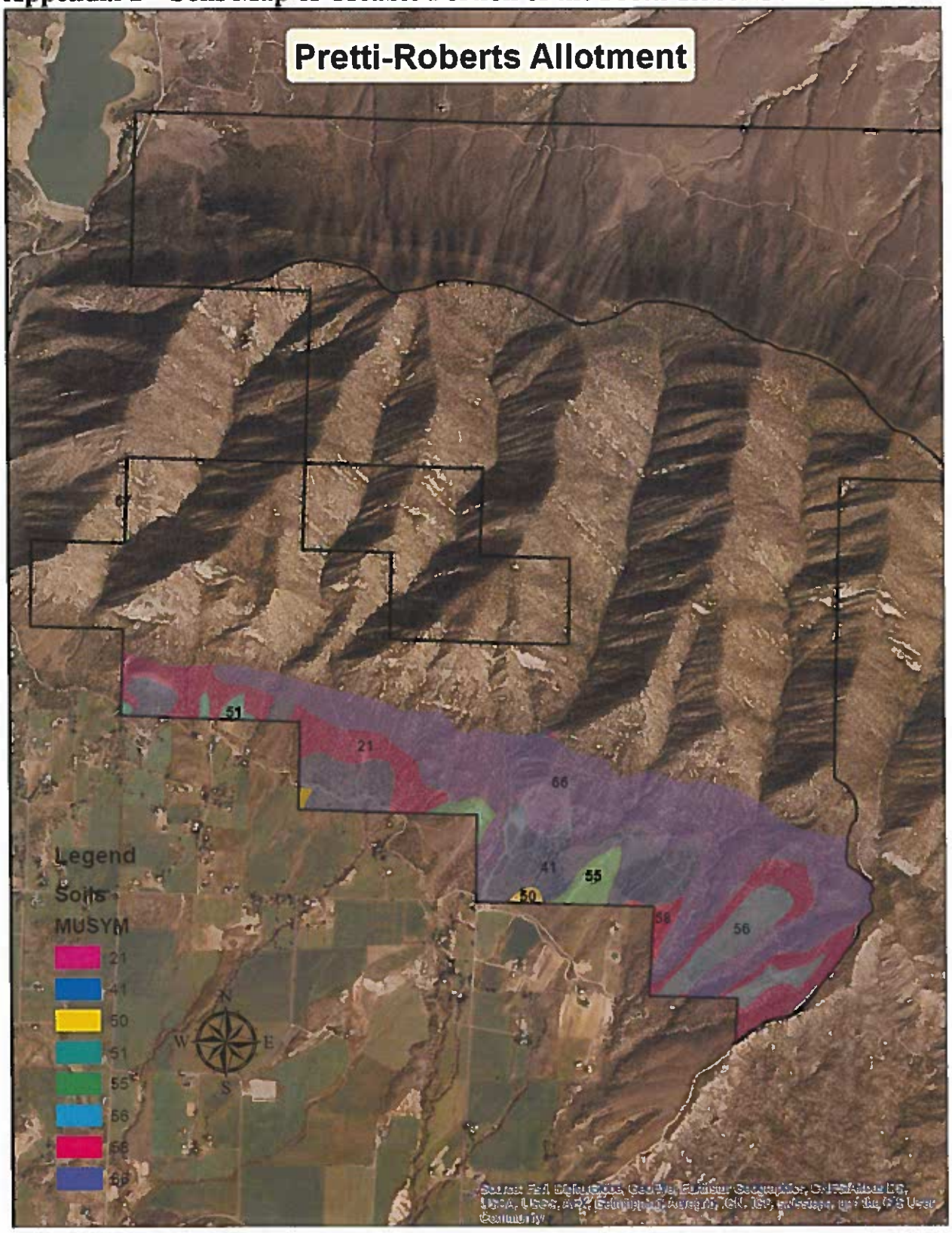
Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). 2016. Map Unit Descriptions for *Rifle Area, Colorado, Parts of Garfield and Mesa Counties.* Soil Data Viewer application. Available online: http://soils.usda.gov/sdv/.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2008. Birds of Conservation Concern 2008. United States Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management, Arlington, Virginia. 85 pp. [Online version available at <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/ NewReportsPublications/ SpecialTopics/BCC2008/BCC2008.pdf].

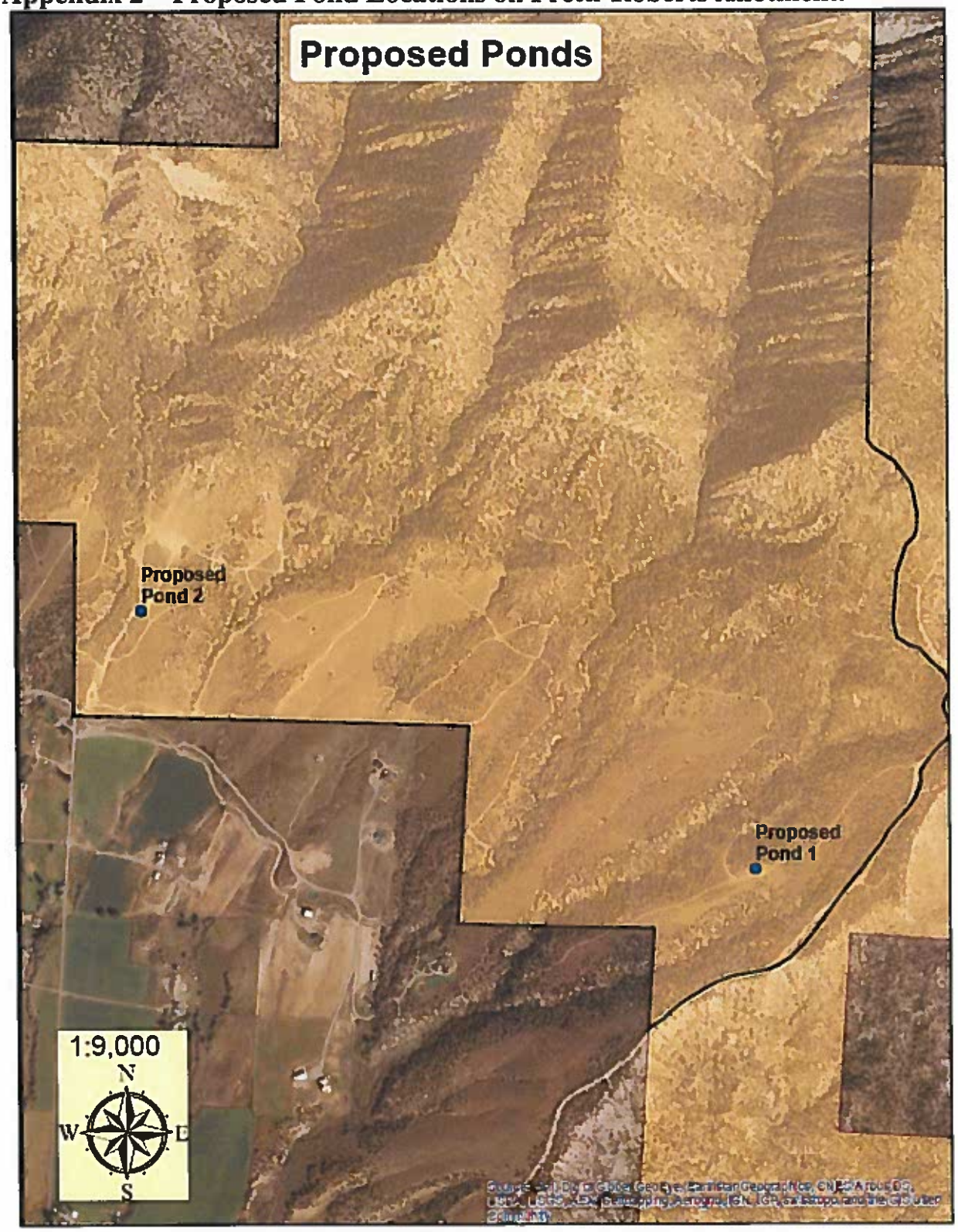
_____. 2015. Website: http://www.fws.gov/ endangered/. [Accessed on 12-9-15].

Vasquez, M. 2005. Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*) Species Assessment (Draft). Prepared for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests. Website: http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5199815.pdf. Accessed on 9-30-14.

Appendix 1 – Soils Map of Useable Portion of the Pretti-Roberts Allotment.



Appendix 2 – Proposed Pond Locations on Pretti-Roberts Allotment.



Appendix 3 – Location of Proposed Ponds on Pretti-Roberts Allotment.

Proposed Pond Location #1

Proposed Pond Location #2

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
COLORADO RIVER VALLEY FIELD OFFICE
SILT, COLORADO

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for
DOI-BLM-N040-2016-0010-EA

Finding of No Significant Impact.

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed action documented in the EA referenced above. The effects of the proposed action are disclosed in the Alternatives and Environmental Effects sections of the EA. Implementing regulations for NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of the effects. Significant, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both *context* and *intensity* as follows:

> (a) Context. This requirement means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):
>
> (b) Intensity. This requirement refers to the severity of the impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and/or adverse.

Impacts associated with issuing these livestock grazing permits are identified and discussed in the Affected Environment and Environmental Effects sections of the EA. The proposed action will not have any significant beneficial or adverse impacts on the resources identified and described in the EA.

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects health or safety.*

The proposed activities will not significantly affect public health or safety. The purpose of the proposed action is to allow for multiple uses while maintaining or improving resource conditions to meet standards for rangeland health in the allotment. Similar actions have not significantly affected public health or safety.

3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as prime and unique farmlands, caves, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness study areas, or ACECs.*

There are no unique characteristics of the area.

4. The degree to which the effects are likely to be highly controversial.

The possible effects of continued livestock grazing are not likely to be highly controversial.

5. The degree to which the effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain nor do they involve unique or uncertain risks. The technical analyses conducted for the determination of the impacts to the resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgment. Therefore, I conclude that there are no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This EA is specific to the allotment described in the Proposed Action. It is not expected to set precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future management consideration in or outside of the allotment.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The area covered by the proposed action only comprises a small portion of the watershed. Cumulatively, many of the future actions planned on private and other lands may have some undetermined effect on wildlife including special status species habitat. The proposed action would create negligible landscape-level cumulative impacts to wildlife when viewed in conjunction with those activities currently occurring and reasonably certain to occur on adjacent private/other lands.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect scientific, cultural, or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Of the 22 cultural resources identified within the allotment, 2 have been determined eligible or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. There is potential for additional cultural resources to be documented within the allotment, specifically in areas with known historic activities or areas near water or other resources. Subsequent site field visits, inventory, and periodic monitoring may have to be done to identify if other historic properties are present as well as determine if there are impacts to these properties within the term of the permit and as funds are made available. If the BLM determines that grazing activities adversely impact the properties, mitigation will be identified and implemented in consultation with the Colorado SHPO. The EA discloses the adverse impacts that could occur to cultural resources from livestock grazing.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

There are no known occurrences or potential habitat for threatened or endangered plants or animals on or adjacent to the allotment. The action would have "no effect" on species protected under the Endangered Species Act.

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action does not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based upon the review of the test for significance and the environmental analyses conducted, I have determined that the actions analyzed in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary for this proposal.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICAL.

B R Hop — 3-1-16

Brian Hopkins
Assistant Field Manager
Colorado River Valley Field Office

Date

United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Colorado River Valley Field Office
2300 River Frontage Road
Silt, CO 81652

IN REPLY REFER TO:
ON 0504595 or 0502901 (CON040)

NOTICE OF PROPOSED DECISION

Dear Grazing Permittee:

Introduction & Background.

On June 16, 2015 grazing permit #0504595 for Wayne Pollard on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment expired. Another grazing permit (#0502901 for Warren and Carla Roberts) did not expire until 2020 but was included as part of the analysis for impact analysis. The two grazing permits involved have undergone review for conformance with the land use plan and compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The review and NEPA compliance has been completed as documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) No. DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2016-0010. The review also includes the construction of two new ponds on the allotment to improve livestock distribution. A copy of the EA is enclosed. Renewal of the lease has also been reviewed for compliance with 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 4110.1(b)(1) which requires a satisfactory record of performance prior to renewal.

Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

The environmental assessment, analyzing the environmental effects of the action, has been reviewed. The action with mitigation measures result in a finding of no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

Rationale: The analysis of the action with mitigation measures did not identify any impacts that would be significant in nature either in context or intensity. The grazing authorization allows for adequate plant growth recovery and promotes healthy rangelands as it relates to rangeland standards. In addition, there is nothing to indicate the action is highly controversial or that it is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant actions.

Proposed Decision.

Grazing Permit #0504595. As a result of this process, it is my proposed decision to renew grazing permit #0504595 for a period of 10 years (March 15, 2016 to March 14, 2026) with the

following revised terms and conditions including a 46% reduction from previously authorized use and the construction of two new ponds on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment.

Grazing Permit #0502901. Cancel previously authorized use on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment authorized to grazing permit #0502901. Re-issue the permit for the remainder of the original term (May 10, 2016 to February 28, 2020) with the following revised terms and conditions for the Roberts and Hogback Common Allotments.

Table 1. Proposed Grazing Schedules.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment & Number	Livestock Number	Livestock Kind	Begin Date	End Date	% BLM Land	AUMs
Wayne Pollard	0504595	Pretti-Roberts (18029)	150	Cattle	04/01	06/01	100	80
Warren and Carla Roberts	0502901	Roberts	120	Sheep	12/01	01/01	88	22
		Hogback Common	750	Sheep	05/16	06/19	100	173
			550	Sheep	12/15	01/20	100	134

Table 2. Allotment Summary AUMS.

Operator Name	Auth. No.	Allotment & Number	Active AUMs	Suspended AUMs	Temporary Suspended AUMS	Permitted Use
Wayne Pollard	0504595	Pretti-Roberts (18029)	80	0	0	80
Warren and Carla Roberts	0502901	Roberts	22	0	0	22
		Hogback Common	305	140	0	445

Terms and Conditions.

1. Adaptive management will be employed on this allotment. The Mandatory Terms and Conditions on this grazing permit show the maximum allowable flexibility. The permittee may use the allotment when the range is ready but not earlier than the beginning dates described in the permit.

2. The cattle permit may be used by up to 150 cattle for 2 weeks or 80 cattle for 1 month within the dates on the permit. Any other combination of livestock numbers and dates would be permissible between 2 weeks and 1 month as long as total permitted use does not exceed 80 AUMs.

3. An actual use report shall be submitted annually to the BLM office no later than 15 days after livestock have been removed (i.e. the grazing end period on the bill or permit/lease).

4. The maximum allowable use on the allotment is considered to be 40% of the current year's growth on key grass species. Key grass species are native perennial grasses.

5. Maintenance of range improvements is required and shall be in accordance with all approved cooperative agreements and range improvement permits/leases. Maintenance shall be completed prior to turnout. Maintenance activities shall be restricted to the footprint (previously disturbed area) of the project as it existed when it was initially constructed. The Bureau of Land Management shall be given 48 hours advance notice of any maintenance work that will involve heavy equipment. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a certified weed-free seed mixture of native species adapted to the site.

6. The permittee/lessees and all persons associated with grazing operations must be informed that any person who injures, destroys, excavates, appropriates or removes any historic or prehistoric ruin, artifact, object of antiquity, Native American remains, Native American cultural item, or archaeological resources on public lands is subject to arrest and penalty of law. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the proponent shall immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity of the discovery that might further disturb such materials and notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until further notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer.

7. As provided by the 2015 Colorado River Valley Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan, all public motorized and mechanized travel is limited to designated routes. Grazing permittees will maintain Administrative Access specifically for livestock operations and maintenance activities, as follows: 1) motorized access on designated routes that are closed to public motorized use; 2) motorized access in areas seasonally closed to public motorized use; and 3) motorized access off designated routes (e.g., fence maintenance). Administrative access is valid for grazing administration only and not for other purposes such as four-wheeling or big game hunting.

8. Salt, mineral blocks, and supplemental feed will be placed a minimum of 0.25 miles and preferably 0.5 miles from riparian areas and other water sources, including springs.

Rationale for the Proposed Decision.

Renewal of the grazing permit/lease is in conformance with the Colorado River Valley Field Office Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved June. 2015.

The Proposed Action helps to achieve the goal of the plan by applying flexible and sustainable livestock grazing, in accordance with BLM Colorado Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management to contribute to local economies, ranching livelihoods, and the rural western character integral to many communities. It also achieves the objective of the plan by meeting the forage demands of livestock operations based on active use, by providing approximately 441,600 acres for livestock grazing, and provide approximately 35,500 AUMs of livestock forage.

An interdisciplinary team prepared an EA (Number DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2016-0010) for the proposed grazing permit/lease renewal. My proposed decision is based on the findings of the analyses contained in the EA. The analysis of the proposed action indicated that the current conditions and land health standards in the Pretti-Roberts Allotment are expected to be maintained or improved. The grazing use proposed allows for adequate plant growth recovery and promotes healthy rangelands as it relates to rangeland standards.

Other terms and conditions have been included to mitigate potential impacts from grazing use and to authorize flexibility in the permit.

Authority.

43 CFR 4100.0-8 states: "The authorized officer shall manage livestock grazing on public lands under the principle of multiple use and sustained yield, and in accordance with applicable land use plans. Land use plans shall establish allowable resource uses (either singly or in combination), related levels of production or use to be maintained, areas of use, and resource condition goals and objectives to be obtained. The plans also set forth program constraints and general management practices needed to achieve management objectives. Livestock grazing activities and management actions approved by the authorized officer shall be in conformance with the land use plan as defined at 43 CFR 1601.0- 5(b)."

43 CFR 4110.2-2(a) states: "Permitted use is granted to holders of grazing preference and shall be specified in all grazing permits or leases. Permitted use shall encompass all authorized use including livestock use, any suspended use, and conservation use, except for permits and leases for designated ephemeral rangelands where livestock use is authorized based upon forage availability, or designated annual rangelands. Permitted livestock use shall be based upon the amount of forage available for livestock grazing as established in the land use plan, activity plan or decision of the authorized officer under § 4110.3-3, except, in the case of designated ephemeral or annual rangelands, a land use plan or activity plan may alternatively prescribe vegetation standards to be met in the use of such rangelands."

43 CFR 4130.2(a) states: "Grazing permits or leases authorize use on the public lands and other BLM-administered lands that are designated in land use plans as available for livestock grazing.

Permits and leases will specify the grazing preference, including active and suspended use. These grazing permits and leases will also specify terms and conditions pursuant to §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, and 4130.3-2."

43 CFR 4130.2(d) states: "The term of the grazing permits or leases authorizing livestock on the public lands and other lands under the administration of the Bureau of Land Management shall be 10 years unless -- (1) The land is being considered for disposal; (2) The land will be devoted to a public purpose which precludes grazing prior to the end of 10 years; (3) The term of the base property lease is less than 10 years, in which case the term of the Federal permit or lease shall coincide with the term of the base property lease; or (4) the authorized officer determines that a permit or lease for less than 10 years is the best interest of sound land management."

43 CFR 4130.3 states: "Livestock grazing permits and leases shall contain terms and conditions determined by the authorized officer to be appropriate to achieve the management and resource condition objectives for the public lands and other lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, and to ensure conformance with the provisions of subpart 4180 of this part."

43 CFR 4130.3-1(a) states: "The authorized officer shall specify the kind and number of livestock, the period(s) of use, the allotment(s) to be used, and the amount of use, in animal unit months, for every grazing permit or lease. The authorized livestock grazing use shall not exceed the livestock carrying capacity of the allotment."

43 CFR 4130.3-2 states: "The authorized officer may specify in grazing permits or leases other terms and conditions which will assist in achieving management objectives, provide for proper range management or assist in the orderly administration of the public rangelands."

43 CFR 4160.1(a) states: "Proposed decisions shall be served on any affected applicant, permittee or lessee and any agent and lien holder of record, who is affected by the proposed actions, terms or conditions, or modifications relating to applications, permits and agreements (including range improvement permits) or leases, by certified mail or personal delivery. Copies of the proposed decisions shall also be sent to the interested public".

Protest and/or Appeal.

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other interested publics may protest a proposed decision under Sec. 43 CFR 4160.1 and 4160.2, in person or in writing to Brian Hopkins, Assistant Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 2300 River Frontage Road, Silt, Colorado 81652 within 15 days after receipt of such decision. The protest, if filed, should clearly and concisely state the reason(s) as to why the proposed decision is in error.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3 (a), in the absence of a protest, the proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice unless otherwise provided in the proposed decision.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3 (b) upon a timely filing of a protest, after a review of protests received and other information pertinent to the case, the authorized officer shall issue a final decision.

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in accordance with 43 CFR 4.470 and 43 CFR 4160.3 and 4160 .4. The appeal must be filed within 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or within 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final. The appeal may be accompanied by a petition for a stay of the decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4.471 and 4.479, pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for a stay must be filed in the office of the

authorized officer, as noted above. The person/party must also serve a copy of the appeal on any person named [43 CFR 4.421(h)] in the decision and the Office of the Solicitor, United States Department of Interior, 755 Parfet Street, Suite 151, Lakewood, Colorado 80215. The BLM does not accept appeals by facsimile or email.

The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error and otherwise complies with the provisions of 43 CFR 4.470.

Should you wish to file a petition for a stay, see 43 CFR 4.471 (a) and (b). In accordance with 43 CFR 4.471(c), a petition for a stay must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

(1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
(2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
(3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
(4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer and serviced in accordance with 43 CFR 4.473. Any person named in the decision from which an appeal is taken (other than the appellant) who wishes to file a response to the petition for a stay may file with the Hearings division a motion to intervene in the appeal, together with the response, within 10 days after receiving the petition. Within 15 days after filing the motion to intervene and response, the person must serve copies on the appellant, the office of the Solicitor and any other person named in the decision (43 CFR 4.472(b)).

Please take a moment to review your enclosed grazing lease. **If you do not have any concerns with the lease as offered, please sign, date, and return both copies to our office.** If you have any questions, contact Kristy Wallner of my range staff at (970) 876-9023.

Sincerely,

B R Hopkins 3-1-16

Brian Hopkins, Date
Assistant Field Manager
Colorado River Valley Field Office

Enclosure(s):
Environmental Assessment (No. DOI-BLM-CO-040-2016-0010)
BLM Form 4130-2a (Grazing permit)

CC:

Wayne Pollard
6448 County Road 233
Silt, CO 81652

Certified Mail 7014 2120 0001 7991 9355

Warren and Carla Roberts
4450 County Road 245
New Castle, CO 81647

Certified Mail 7014 2120 0001 7991 9362

Form 4120-6
(March 2011)

FORM APPROVED
OMB NO. 1004-0019
Expires: September 30, 2013

FOR BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT USE ONLY

State. . . . . CO

Office N040

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

COOPERATIVE RANGE IMPROVEMENT AGREEMENT

Project Number(s)	Pond 1 #019473
	Pond 2 #019474

INSTRUCTIONS - Cooperator(s) to receive original, and one copy each to the District/Field Office case or lease file and District/Field Office project file.

Project Name(s)
Pond 1 and Pond 2

1. I, (We) Wayne Pollard of 6448 County Road 233, Silt CO 81652

of

of

and of

hereinafter called cooperator(s) and the United States of America, by the Bureau of Land Management, hereinafter called the BLM, for and in consideration of the mutual benefits hereunder, and in accordance with the Taylor Grazing Act (43 U.S.C. 315, 315a-r), as amended, the National Soil Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 590a(3)), as amended, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1701, et seq.), and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act (43 U.S.C. 1904) do enter into this cooperative agreement for the construction and/or maintenance of range improvements, installation of conservation works or establishment of conservation practices, hereinafter referred to collectively as improvements, for the benefit of the public lands and of the cooperator(s).

2. The improvement(s) known as the
Cedar Mtn Ponds

☐ will be ☑ is (are) located upon: 1/4, Sec(s). 29 T. 5S R. 91W ,

Meridian, County of Garfield , State of Colorado ,

3. IT IS MUTUALLY AGREED:

(a) The parties hereto will furnish labor, materials, and equipment as required, the total cost of value not to exceed the amount listed below for each of the parties respectively for the initial construction and/or installation of the improvements indicated in paragraph 2.

NAME(S) OF COOPERATOR(S)	ITEMS	TOTAL COST OR VALUE
Wayne Pollard	Construction of 2 new ponds on the Pretti-Roberts Allotment	$ 600.00
Grand Junction Grazing Advisory Board	Funding Support	480.00
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT	NEPA and surveys	1,000.00
	AGGREGATE COST	$ 2,080.00

(Continued on page 2)

14. Special Conditions

Maintenance of range improvements is required and shall be in accordance with all approved cooperative agreements and range improvement permits. Maintenance shall be completed prior to turn out. Maintenance activities shall be restricted to the footprint (previously disturbed area) of the project as it existed when it was initially constructed. The Bureau of Land Management shall be given 48 hours advanced notice of any maintenance work that will involve heavy equipment. Disturbed areas will be reseeded with a certified weed-free seed mixture of native species adapted to the site.

The permittee and all persons associated with grazing operations must be informed that any person who injures, destroys, excavates, appropriates or removes any historic or prehistoric ruin, artifact, object of antiquity, Native American remains, Native American cultural item, or archaeological resources on public land is subject to arrest and penalty of law. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the proponent shall immediately suspend all activities in the immediate vicinity of the discovery that might further disturb such materials and notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings. The discovery must be protected until further notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer.

Any paleontological resources discovered by the holder, or any person working on his behalf, on public or Federal land shall be immediately reported to the authorized officer. Holder shall suspend all operations in the immediate area of such discovery until written authorization to proceed is issued by the authorized officer. An evaluation of the discovery will be made by the authorized officer to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values. The holder will be responsible for the cost of evaluation and any decision as to proper mitigation measures will be made by the authorized officer after consulting with the holder.

COOPERATOR(S)		THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	
(Signature)	(Date)	State of Colorado	
(Signature)	(Date)	District/Field Office Colorado River Valley Field Office	
(Signature)	(Date)	By (Signature)	
(Signature)	(Date)	(Title)	
(Signature)	(Date)	(Date)	

Title 18, U.S.C., Section 1001, makes it a crime for any person knowingly and willfully to make to any department or agency of the United States any false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or representations as to any matter within its jurisdiction.

(Continued on page 4)

Appendix 2 – Proposed Pond Locations on Pretti-Roberts Allotment.